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**VICTORIAN RELIGION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON
WOMEN WRITERS: A Study of Four Women: Grace
Aguilar, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot and Mary Kingsley**

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned to explore the relationships between religion, gender and questions of self identity in the nineteenth century through an investigation that works to draw connections between the lives and publications of four representative women of the period: Grace Aguilar, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot and Mary Kingsley. The selection of these particular women has been part of the concern of the thesis in its attempt to work both across disciplinary areas (religious studies, literature, history) and to employ theoretical and methodological perspectives which utilise the approaches from cultural studies and feminist scholarship to questions of texts and subjectivities, commonly referred to as 'autobiography' within particular socio-historical contexts. In attempting to plot a matrix of associations between the key issues within the debates on religion, gender and questions of self formation and identity it was important to have figures which have survived their own moment of history. These are George Eliot and Mary Kingsley and to include those who have disappeared or who have become marginalised in some way which is the case to be made with respect to Grace Aguilar and Harriet Martineau. The argument of the thesis has worked to establish some of the possible links between religious denominational contexts and the lives and productions of the individual women under consideration. It has also worked to provide a series of arguments that explore the range of overlapping territories and connections between women during the nineteenth century when research has been confined to discipline specific studies. A case study approach on each of the individual women, like the one presented here, has the strength of both depth of analysis to their specific contexts as well as providing moments of association and recognition between them. Within this framework of knowledge the arguments offered here are in some ways original insights gathered from previous and wide ranging cultural debates on women in the nineteenth century and their contributions to intellectual discourse.

Chapter One Introduction: gender, religion and autobiography

The term *chronotope*, as used by Bakhtin, denotes a configuration of spatial and temporal indicators in a fictional setting where (and when) certain activities and stories *take place*. One cannot realistically situate historical detail - putting something 'in its time' - without appealing to explicit or implicit chronotopes¹

In the following investigation into the lives and work of four nineteenth century women writers, Grace Aguilar, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, and Mary Kingsley, religion becomes the cultural chronotope whereby it can be determined that 'certain activities and stories take place'. Each of the four women under discussion had different religious belief systems and backgrounds. These can be seen as the locus of central importance both in the formation of themselves and their ideas about self-hood and identity as well as in the subsequent depictions they then represent to the public world in their writings. Michael Holquist acknowledges the centrality within the writings of the Russian intellectual Michel Bakhtin of the 'total emphasis on particularity, situatedness, location. These factors together can then be used to contemplate questions of self-hood and hence identity and issues of nationality'.² Bakhtin's work was concerned with 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'³ and it is the point at which these intersect which is referred to as the chronotope. Holquist states therefore that the chronotope equals 'the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied' or where the particular combinations of time and space as they have resulted in historically manifested narrative forms can be determined and interpreted. Whilst Bakhtin's own work was largely concerned with discussions of literary texts, his methodology, in particular the development of ideas with respect to the chronotope as a unit of analysis, have now become established within other areas and disciplines of study. Meaghan Morris endorses this with the comment that 'the beauty of the chronotope is to enable us to think about the cultural interdependence of spatial and temporal categories in terms of variable relations'.⁴ The four women under discussion here and their writings thus become the site at which certain knots of narrative are tied and untied with respect to issues of religion, gender and self-representation.

¹ James Clifford, "On Collecting Art & Culture", in Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Routledge, London, 1993, p.66.

² Michael Holquist, *Bakhtin and His World*, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 108.

³ Michael Holquist, *Bakhtin and His World*, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 109.

⁴ Meaghan Morris, "On the Beach", in L.Grossberg, C.Nelson & P. Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 460.

Religion, as a discourse and as a framework for social organisation and understanding is seen, in the nineteenth century, as having pivotal importance and is widely acknowledged in many areas of academic research and scholarship. In general terms religion in this historical period has rightly been claimed as a central 'shaping force'.⁵ All avenues of life and thought can be seen, with hindsight, to have been affected either directly or indirectly by the dominant and prevailing religious ethos and culture of the period. Having said this it can also be suggested that the acknowledgement given to this now by literary scholars, critics and historians in their overviews of the period has resulted in rather slim and particularly located bodies of scholarship. There is then a case to suggest that the secular concerns and orientations of our own times in the late twentieth century have led to the overshadowing or marginalisation of substantive evidence in support of the general overview. Hence, the acknowledgement of religion as a shaping force becomes written in the margins of the lives of many of the important and influential thinkers and writers of the period. In many ways the stating of the religious context has acted as a signifier that there is no need for further investigation.

It can also be suggested that when religion is studied during this period there is concern to acknowledge and demonstrate the general trends and overall movement during the nineteenth century, in particular, the movement from one of belief to doubt. In this way the dominant cognitive map of the century as a whole is one where there is a move away from the religious to the secular model of thought and social organisation. This overview of the nineteenth century can then be used to fulfil a particular cultural need for 'sense-making'. Of making knowable a period which was one actually marked by complex and diverse arguments and debates within religious denominations, between religious groups, as well as the phenomenal cultural debates that ranged throughout the whole of this century. A century marked by profound, rapid and dramatic social, economic and political change that touched all areas of life. This 'shorthand' overview of the century has also perhaps worked to negate and marginalise the ways in which these socio-historical changes were also felt and reacted against by the various religious denominations. What this might also hide would be the ensuing impact on the lives, thoughts and works of particular individuals with regard to personal faith as well as with regard to the wider theological and doctrinal matters.

It is also worth pointing out that where work in Victorian studies has been carried out, particularly in the relationship of religion and literature, the focus for attention has tended to be concentrated upon the 'Great Men of Letters' rather than upon the 'equivalent' female experience and representation. Such work to date would, of course, include those writings on

⁵ Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper & Raphael Samuel (eds.), *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, History Workshop Series, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1987, p.4.

John Henry Newman's *Loss and Gain*, and his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and Gerard Manley Hopkins', "The Desolation Sonnets".⁶ These, in the main, can be seen as exemplary investigations into the lives of these men and the ways in which their religious and spiritual concerns are given representation in literary and quasi-autobiographical forms. These representations are then read back into the culture of the period and used to reinforce the general overview of turbulence and debate in religious matters and the impact of these on the lives of these important intellectual figures.

One area that has begun to emerge from these works however is the need to begin to make more systematic links with the general judgements being made on this period with respect to religion and the actual relationships and experiences of these by particular individuals. A need therefore, to evaluate the links between lived experience and issues of representation which would begin to take on board more fully the complexities which abound in any historical period with regard to issues of power, class and gender relations. This work has already become established within historical studies of the nineteenth century. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's book, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-Class 1780-1850*, is an example of this and is regarded by many scholars as a seminal work in this area. In their study, which concentrates on the public records and personal documents of middle-class families in the industrial town of Birmingham and the agricultural counties of Essex and Suffolk they provide a full evaluation of middle-class life and the interactive complexities of gender and class over one hundred years. Their study does acknowledge how 'writing provided a form of intervention for women at a time when other kinds of public speech were increasingly difficult'.⁷ This thesis is concerned to investigate this specifically with respect to women writers to establish links between their lived experience and raise issues with regard to aspects

⁶ A general overview study of nineteenth century religious developments illustrates this in Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 1. 1799-1870*, Yale University Press, New York, 1972 as does Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1964 although Willey does also have a chapter on George Eliot, which will be referred to further in Chapter Four of this thesis. For more recent analysis of John Henry Newman see, Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman: A Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988. Robert Bernard Martin's work, *Gerard Manley Hopkins, A Very Private Life*, Flamingo, London, 1992 also provides some useful re-readings of Gerard Manley Hopkins' work and three essays, Michael Bartholomew, "The Moral Critique of Christian Orthodoxy", Gerald Parsons, "On Speaking Plainly: 'Honest Doubt' and the Ethics of Belief", James. R. Moore, "The Crisis of Faith: Reformation versus Revolution" in Gerald Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain Volume 11*, Manchester University Press in association with The Open University, Manchester, 1988 also provide useful summaries of debates during this period but, in the main, focus upon the contributions made by male thinkers and writers. The essay by James. R. Moore does refer, in his listing of 'honest doubters' contributing to *The Westminster Review* in the 1850's, to Harriet Martineau and George Eliot but does not fully explore their intellectual positions in these debates in detail.

⁷ Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes, Men and Women of the English middle class 1750-1850*, Routledge, London, 1992, p.146.

of representation of self - identity within their work. The study here is concerned to place emphasis throughout on the individual woman writer and her connection with wider intellectual debates of the nineteenth century. To then begin to establish the relationships between these debates and their impact upon the presentation of selfhood which foregrounds the female intellectual. Central here would be the ways in which individuals are located within the cultural paradigm with regard to access to various kinds of knowledge as well as ways in which lived experience is mediated or constrained by these. One of the key areas of concern here would be with the centrality in any form of representation of the connections between religion and language. How, in fact, issues of power, class and gender are transmitted through language that is affected by and through religious belief and knowledge. Hence, any work by a creative artist is dependent upon the ways in which language is used and understood within the culture and intellectual context of any given period.

These connections between language and religion are of central importance when analysing the articulations of 'coming to self-hood' of the women writers of the period. It can be asserted that their self - identification processes are affected by the religious discourse in which they have grown up and become a part of, even if this is to be later rejected as a personal belief system. The connections are also central to their literary endeavours notwithstanding the fact that for three of the four women in this particular study - Grace Aguilar, Harriet Martineau and George Eliot - it is the denominational religion of their respective families which empowers them into print in the first instance. In the case of the fourth woman, Mary Kingsley, there is a case to suggest that her impulse for travel and for writing arose in direct opposition to her family influences and religious observance and practices. Their 'literary' productions are also making use of implicit religious connections and associations throughout. It is also important to think about the ways in which women are also given an understanding of 'place' within these particular denominations as women. Also to begin to evaluate the concomitant ways in which they are then enabled or restrained to give voice to this in their lives and work. For Ursula King has noted how, 'Gender and religion are closely interrelated as our perceptions of ourselves are shaped by and deeply rooted in our culturally shared religious and philosophical heritage, even when this is rejected. Religious traditions, beliefs and practices too are shaped by and perceived from the perspective of gender'.⁸ The concern here then is to use the lives and the works of these four Victorian women to investigate more fully these connections.

These debates and arguments are themselves situated in wider cultural references with regard to gender and religion. Obelkevich and his colleagues suggest in *Disciplines of Faith*

that there is a line of thought in historical writings which appears to present a stereotype of women as being 'by their nature more spiritual than men, essentially more religious'.⁹ This depiction exists even though women may have been actually excluded from the mainstream or public offices of the denominations of which they were a part. Here then is another conundrum which has to be unravelled because it appears that the spiritual may mean something different from religious or at least appears to have some particular emphasis of 'unworldly'. Within the ideological context of the nineteenth century this has a particular poignancy in the light of the accepted ideas about women and female sexuality that have been constructed hitherto. The dominant ideal of middle-class womanhood is encapsulated in the phrase 'angel of the house' and this phrase is now shorthand usage to depict what was actually a very complex development in the nineteenth century with regard to gender roles. The origins of the phrase derive from the poem "The Angel in the House" written by Coventry Patmore and published in 1854. Carol Christ in her essay "Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House" notes how through this symbolism, 'the angel brings a more than moral purity to the home that she at once creates and sanctifies, for which her mate consequently regards her with a sentimental, essentially religious reverence'.¹⁰ This position has been extended further in nineteenth century writings so that today these ideas are seen as an encodement of the ideology of the separate spheres,¹¹ an ideology which positions, through gender differentiation, male as the active sex within the public sphere whilst the female is consigned to a passive role confined in the domestic sphere of the home and hearth. The work of John Ruskin can be taken as exemplary of this position. In his book, *Sesame and Lilies* he endorsed the sentiments of Patmore's poem establishing further that women, in this private sphere, have a unique and particular function as the 'moral custodians of culture' separated as they were from the harsh

⁸ Ursula King, (ed.), *Religion and Gender*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, p.2.

⁹ Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel in their Introduction to *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, History Workshop Series, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1988, p.8.

¹⁰ Carol Christ, "Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House", in Martha Vicinus, (ed.), *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, Methuen and Co., London, 1977, p.146. For a fuller discussion of this essay by Christ in relation to George Eliot see my chapter, "'The Angel of a Homeless Tribe': issues of religion, race and gender in George Eliot's poetic drama, *The Spanish Gypsy*" in Andrew Bradstock & Anne Hogan, (eds.), *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing 'The Angel in the House'*, Macmillan, London, 1998.

¹¹ Useful discussions of the impact of this ideology of separate spheres for male and female activity can be found in, for example, Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, Macmillan, London, 1985, Martha Vicinus, (ed.), *Suffer and Be Still*, Methuen & Co., London, 1980, Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets & William Veeder, *The Woman Question: Society and Literature in Britain and America 1837-1883*, Vols. 1, 2, & 3., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, Susan Mendus & Jane Rendall (eds.), *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century*, Routledge, London, 1989.

realities of the workplace and the everyday world ¹². Ruskin's writings are especially important in the way in which they effectively activate the idealised religious symbolism of the angel to a position that demonstrates a more civic or secular symbolism of and for feminine behaviour and responsibility. The chapter in *Sesame and Lilies* that outlines this is actually called, 'Of Queen's Gardens' where Ruskin is invoking aspects of authority within nineteenth century culture by suggesting that each and every middle class woman is (or could become) the Queen of her own hearth and home¹³. In some aspects these ideas can be seen as incorporating certain aspects of nineteenth century romanticism with their frameworks of courtly love, adoration, respect and deference. Whilst the model of 'the Angel in the House' worked towards idealisation through worship, the model from Ruskin was concerned to move the parameters of the debate away from an explicitly religious one to harness this ideal for civic and civil reasons. The 'ideal woman' was therefore placed in the domestic, the private world of hearth and home protected, but also protective of the morals of her day ¹⁴. What is quite extraordinary about many of the writings of the idealised versions of woman and femininity during the nineteenth century is that they are composed and represented largely by men of the period who have influence and fame and can thus influence the dominant social discourse of the period. This is not to deny their importance as representations or as arguments, but what is needful is to think about the ways in which these ideals and dominant stereotypes were being received and thought about by the women themselves. In particular when these ideas and ideals are enmeshed with religious and other discourses. Also, it is necessary to contextualise these debates in relation to the time period in which these women were writing. For example, Grace Aguilar and Harriet Martineau were publishing their works which were concerned with explorations of women's position in society long before these ideas about 'a woman's place' had become fully articulated or encoded. Further questions can also be raised with regard to the influence of these ideas on the women themselves as they gain currency within the culture: what were these women thinking, writing, and believing during this period? How did these issues affect their sense of themselves as women? How were their writings, in part, an exploration of these links between themselves as women and the time and cultural context in which they moved?

One of the ways in which we can begin to work towards answering questions like these is to look at the writings of women from the period. It is necessary here to look at different kinds of writings and to work between private testimonies, diaries, letters, notebooks as well as

¹² John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, London, 1865.

¹³ 'Of Queen's Gardens' was originally delivered by John Ruskin as a lecture on December 1864 to a mixed audience in Manchester Town Hall.

¹⁴ Walter Houghton in *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1957, p.343 calls John Ruskin's book 'the most important single document I know for the

fictional representations and articles of scholarly reputation because for these women under discussion writing itself was an act of learning: acts of language acquisition for translation work, the learning of the language of nineteenth century intellectual discourse for the publication of works in learned journals and for the representation of review and article work. It is only by reading across and through these various writings, using as our central point, the comments and investigations into matters religious that one can begin to establish some common ground of influence, mentorship figures, intellectual networks and kinships of affiliation. For instance one of the remarkable findings of this research is that most of these particular women began their careers actually writing about religious matters and were published first in religious journals before they turned to writing fiction. One critic has actually suggested that 'women took to the public platform on behalf of religion long before they were stirred to speak about politics'¹⁵ which is of enormous significance to this project and its concerns.

The fictional writings of these women are also significant however because of the ways in which women were often denied access to other areas for public speech or public performance of their ideas. It also can be seen as a powerful instrument for the dissemination of ideas and beliefs. Sarah Ellis maintains in *Pictures of Private Life* that 'Fiction may be compared to a key which opens many minds that would be closed against a sermon'.¹⁶ This statement appears to open up further avenues for exploration because of the ways in which it highlights the extension of the audience for ideas if they are in the form of say a novel rather than a sermon. There is also an acknowledgement here of changing cultural assumptions about the reception of ideas. This suggests that some people would be more kindly disposed to taking ideas on board when they were offered in this way rather than if there was a more codified transmission of these ideas from the confines of the church or the chapel. This is of crucial significance within the debates about nineteenth century religion, class and education, which have preoccupied historians, theologians and literary scholars for many years and where there has been much activity.¹⁷

characteristic idealization of love, woman, and the home in Victorian society'.

¹⁵ Gail Malmgreen, (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, Croom Helm, London, 1986, quoted in Ursula King, (ed.), *Religion and Gender*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, p.18.

¹⁶ Alex Owen, "Women and nineteenth century spiritualism: Strategies in the subversion of femininity", in Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel, (eds.), *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, p.142.

¹⁷ Texts here include: W.O.B. Allen and Edmund McClure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1698-1898*, London, 1898; Susan Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief*, London, 1977; Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1974; T.W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability, Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850*, New Haven, 1976; David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography*, Methuen, London, 1981; Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing*

In order to facilitate this research it has been essential to develop a methodology that works across the 'normal' disciplinary boundaries of history, literature, and religious studies and this has been made possible through the academic scholarship provided within the territories of cultural studies and feminist theory. This research works across disciplinary boundaries but has a particular focus of study with regard to the lives and works of these four women from the nineteenth century. Its main concern is to look at the intersection of religion, ideology and gender with specific emphasis on the pathway to self-hood and self-identity that religious discourse provides. Three out of the four women in this study, it is argued, lost or gave up their faith in what one might call organised or institutionalised religious structures and organisations. This did not prevent them however from maintaining throughout their lives a commitment to an intellectual project of knowledge that religion has initially provided for them and which is made manifest within some of their writings. By looking at these processes this work is the first step towards redrawing or extending the territory with respect to feminist scholarship and the study of religion with a particular emphasis on literary and cultural productions from the Victorian period.

The women at the centre of this study have been selected on the basis of providing additional knowledge to those women who are already constructed in some way as 'representative Victorian figures' as well as to supplement and perhaps challenge this with discussions of lesser-known women. This predetermined desire to have both well-known figures and those women more obscured by or lost to history appears to be essential in order to substantiate the implicit assumptions raised earlier. These represent a challenge to the current and dominant paradigms with respect to women writers, religion and gender identity during this period of the past. By keeping in place the dynamic between the 'famous' or well-known and the lesser or more marginalised women it is possible to begin to establish similarities and points of comparison as well as to begin to raise further questions for consideration. The four women selected have also been determined by the concern to investigate different denominational aspects with regard to religion and the effects on issues of femininity, self-formation and identity. Whilst, earlier in this chapter, it has been noted how the religious denominations of Grace Aguilar, Harriet Martineau and George Eliot all provided a catalyst for the available vehicles for their first published writings it has also been essential to have another axis of comparison with respect to religious differentiation. Hence, there is an additional dimension of embracing religious phenomenology by working between two mainstream English religious

and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985; Margaret Homas, *Bearing the Word: Language and Experience in Nineteenth Century Women's Writing*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1986.

traditions of Protestantism, (Anglican and Non-Conformist) and between two world religious movements, Judaism and Islam in their 'English' context in the nineteenth century. This provides the general framework in which the lives and the work of these four women will be discussed.

Earlier in this introduction it was stated that this research was concerned to have a balance between women from the nineteenth century who are already known and studied and those more obscured or hidden in history. A further development of this is also of importance in the way in which these more well known figures have been positioned in particular ways. It is asserted that through reading and analysing more fully the religious dimension to their lives and works this current perception or positioning may be a rather limited and or limiting one. In this way knowledge about the women and their influence becomes part of a continuing project rather than to assume that scholarship so far has given us all the information we need. For example, Harriet Martineau has in the twentieth century been 'rediscovered'. Her two volumed *Autobiography* and her novel, *Deerbrook*, were republished by the feminist publishing house, Virago in London in the 1980s as part of that particular publishing company's concern to reclaim women's works from the past. Following the reissue of these, Harriet Martineau's important contribution in the nineteenth century was acknowledged. *Deerbrook*, (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three), is claimed by some critics, as the first novel to have at its centre the newly formed middle class professionals. It is also the first to have a doctor as hero. Harriet Martineau's fictional *Tales of Political Economy* also contributed to the transmission of political ideas to the masses. Her use within these of a popularist narrative form of communication was seen as a new area of writing. Also acknowledged were her commentaries and extensive articles on Victorian life in general. Very little emphasis has been given to the importance of religion in her life, her writings and her own developing consciousness with regard to her personal identity. Harriet Martineau's personal religious journey from Unitarianism to Mesmerism can be seen as pivotal to this because her involvement in the latter can be seen to have led to a general discrediting of her work and contribution overall. It therefore is necessary to reappraise some of the debates about Harriet Martineau and her work and to begin to extend and develop some of the common generalisations about the period as a whole.

The other very famous Victorian writer in this investigation, George Eliot, has received a substantial amount of attention for her achievements as a novelist and essayist. This concentration of research has also provided examples of studies that work to chart the influence of evangelicalism on her as a novelist. An important example of this is Elizabeth Jay's, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel*. Within

this study Jay is primarily concerned 'to show the contribution made by Evangelical ideas and the practices to the development and direction of the English novel'.¹⁸ *The Religion of the Heart* provides a systematic study of novelists from the nineteenth century who are drawing upon Dissenting and Anglican Evangelicalism within their works. Chapter four of the book centres on George Eliot with analyses of, in particular, *Scenes from Clerical Life* and *Middlemarch*. Jay claims George Eliot was 'paramount amongst major novelists in the accuracy and subtlety with which she used her experience of Evangelicalism'¹⁹ within her novel writing. However the main objective of *The Religion of the Heart* is the 'desire to bring back to the twentieth century reader the experience and understanding of the nineteenth century novelists and their audiences'²⁰ across a broad range of minor and major novelists of the period. In the chapter on Eliot there is the beginning of an argument that will be developed further in this thesis with regard to the centrality that religion plays throughout George Eliot's life and writings both explicitly and implicitly. This will be demonstrated through reading across the different forms of writing that she pursues - her fiction and her poetry - as well as her journals and letters. The central text for analysis will be extracted from her poetry in order to highlight how a change in form for this writer also provided a wider and different landscape for her to write upon. (See Chapter Four for detailed discussion of these issues)

The lesser known nineteenth century women under discussion here include Grace Aguilar the Jewish novelist and historian who spent most of her writing life concerned with presenting fictionalised representations which would persuade Jewish women to assimilate into English culture. Whilst Grace Aguilar published prolifically and was immensely popular during the nineteenth century none of her work is currently in print. The final writer is Mary Kingsley who, since this work began, has had some further attention particularly from feminist scholars who have been concerned to analyse her life in the context of the Victorian Woman Traveller. However, whilst this is obviously an important aspect of her life this work is more concerned to illuminate how these travels entailed journeys in faith and self-hood as well as adventure and discovery. Mary Kingsley is also the 'odd one out' in that she did not compose fictional writings but did produce detailed books outlining her travels and discoveries in West Africa. These can actually, it will be argued later, be seen as representational type narratives. These and her lectures and letters become the focus of attention to map her own personal religious journey from orthodox Christianity to someone who had an interest and fascination

¹⁸ Elizabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, p. 2.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century Novel*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, p.208.

²⁰ Elizabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth Century*

with the culture of Islam and are the focus within Chapter Five.

In a project of this range of inquiry it has been essential to make some strategic decisions concerning the study of the actual works written by these four women. In fact, the selection process itself was made more evident when as research progressed there began to emerge very particular lines of connection and overlapping between the lives, works and ideas of these very different women in their writings and their intellectual concerns. For instance both George Eliot and Grace Aguilar, from their very different religious backgrounds composed fictional representations of events in fifteenth century Spain when there is the intersection of religious debate between the Christians, the Jews, the Moors and the Gypsies. This discovery has of course led to as many questions being asked as being answered to which this work will return in more detail in later chapters. Also, it began to emerge that these women were also aware of each other through the various intellectual networks during the period and in some cases, as between Harriet Martineau and George Eliot actually communicated and visited each other. Again perhaps Mary Kingsley here appears a kind of oddity but it will be established that she, in fact, begins to live out those ideas and beliefs that the other women have but imagined only in their writings. Through the investigation of gender and empire, nationhood and identity, religion and fantasy, Mary Kingsley can be seen to live out the lives of some of the representational heroines that these other writers have left us.

The work of Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*, has been particularly relevant here in the ways in which she provides a methodological approach of traversing between texts and life/ life as texts arguments.²¹ In the case of all four women under investigation the writings that they themselves produce can be read, in some degree, as 'autobiographical' with respect to the information provided on their spiritual and intellectual developments as women of their time. It is also worth mentioning here Carolyn Heilbrun's suggestion that there are actually four different and distinct ways in which a woman may write her life: autobiography, fiction, biography and finally, and perhaps more opaque, a text in which a woman unconsciously writes her life in advance of living it.²² This trajectory appears to map exactly the connections and overlapping territories between these four women, with Mary Kingsley actually living out the adventurous life that the other three women writers have only imagined in their creative writings. Also, in entering into the territory of autobiographical writings and theories of the self there is also the suggestion that 'women's autobiographies are different, less ego-focused and more concerned with a self located in a network of others'.²³

Novel, Clarendon, Oxford, 1979, p. 2.

²¹ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing A Woman's Life*, The Women's Press, London, 1989.

²² Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing A Woman's Life*, The Women's Press, London, 1989, Introduction.

²³ Mary Mason, "Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women", Introduction cited in Susan

Whilst this position will be debated in later chapters in its relation to other theories of self-writing, it is a significant position to consider in respect of the work of the four women at the centre of this particular study. It is worth quoting the development of this argument from Mary Mason's, *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women*, as outlined by Susan Stanford Friedman. She notes that 'Mason argues...that women's sense of self exists within a context of a deep awareness of others'²⁴ and further that 'Women do not present the 'self' on a dramatic scale where a battle of opposing forces is played out'.²⁵ Here Susan Stanford Friedman notes how Mason is actually setting this up in 'opposition to the models of autobiography based in the example of Saint Augustine's *Confessions*'.²⁶ Mason continues to work to disrupt yet another model of autobiographical representation by the suggestion that, 'nor do women, use a Rousseauesque version of the confession, in which characters and events exist only to become part of the landscape of the hero's self-discovery'.²⁷ These reference points of association are significant in themselves within the nineteenth century intellectual culture that all four women inhabited and were aware of, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Because of the range and prolific productions of the four women who are at the centre of this study it has been essential to make connections through the selection of particular works and writings. Having said this it has also become evident that this thesis is actually but a small part of an emerging and fruitful area of research into the intertextual connections and resonances with respect to issues of history, religion, gender formations and representations. Hence, for the purpose of this particular piece of work, the very careful selection of individual works as exemplary ones for exploration and discussion has been an essential aspect to consider throughout. The employment of a theoretical mode of enquiry which embraces the issues and dynamics of 'autobiographical' discourse, sometimes referred to as 'self -writing',

Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice", in Shari Benstock, (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1988, p.43-44.

²⁴ Mary Mason cited in Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" in Shani Benstock, (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1988, p.43.

²⁵ Mary Mason cited in Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" in Shani Benstock, (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1988, p.43.

²⁶ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" in Shani Benstock, (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1988, p. 43.

²⁷ Mary Mason cited in Susan Stanford Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice", in Shani Benstock, (ed.), *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1988, p.43.

discussed earlier has established how 'as subject matter autobiography seems specifically suited to the study of women's literature in Western culture, since so many women have written (though not always published) letters, journals, diaries or stories of their lives'²⁸.

With this in mind it has been important to embrace these different modes of writing when analysing the continuing importance of religion to the four women under discussion here. So, in each case particular texts have been selected as 'key' exemplary texts with supporting and supplementary information coming from other 'personal' testimonies - diaries, letters, notebooks - in order to achieve some balance between public and private narratives and articulations of gender, religion and self-hood. This has been crucial in working to continue a developing tradition within feminist scholarship of 'breaking with the conventions of objectivity'²⁹ in order to take note of the significance 'when the writer's presence seems to tear through the fabric of the academic text - revealing glimmers of the lived experience that forms the context of scholarly writing'.³⁰

It has been essential to keep these dynamics across a variety of boundaries in view throughout and this, in part, can be seen as 'in keeping' or mimetic of these women's work themselves. They, too, were transgressing 'assumed' boundaries of writing, being and thinking. With this rationale in mind the following texts have been selected and given priority for the four women. Grace Aguilar will be looked at in relation to two of her novels, *Home Influence: A Tale for Mothers and Daughters* and *The Vale of Cedars*. *Home Influence* was published in 1847 and is the first novel of Grace Aguilar and the only one of her novels to be published in her lifetime. The remaining ones, which include *The Vale of Cedars*, were published after her death via the endeavours of her mother. The selection of two novels from this writer's career will also be discussed in more detail and the ways in which this research has begun to unearth a series of paradoxes in evidence in Aguilar's representations of Jewishness and her treatment of issues of femininity. The full significance and the relationships between texts and life will be discussed in Chapter Two but it is important to stress that Grace Aguilar, by the time of the publication of these novels, was both a well known writer of her day and a respected and 'respectable' public figure. These factors are particularly important here with regard to the continuum of the debates about nineteenth century ideas and 'ideals' of femininity and propriety.

This is also the case with the selection for close reading of extracts from Harriet

²⁸ Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndt, (eds.), *Feminisms*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 1991, p. 1033.

²⁹ Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndt, (eds.), *Feminisms*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 1991, p. 1033.

³⁰ Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndt, (eds.), *Feminisms*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey,

Martineau's novel, *Deerbrook* within the wider context of her own depiction of her life in her two volume *Autobiography*. She, too, by the time of the publication of *Deerbrook*, in 1839, was well known for her other writings and a public figure of some respect. Different from Grace Aguilar however, and the reason for this choice, is that this is the only full length novel that Harriet Martineau published even though she does use the fictional mode of representation for short tales and moral tracts throughout her writing career. *Deerbrook* remained largely ignored in the twentieth century until the reissue of it by Virago Press in 1983, as stated earlier. This had meant that for a long time Harriet Martineau's legacy was largely confined within historical texts. Her materials (essays, polemics, and fictional tracts) were often used as evidence in footnotes and marginalia to demonstrate issues of social, economic, political significance. Harriet Martineau is also the only one of these four women under discussion who writes her own autobiography in the recognised form of self-presentation and this will, of course, be taken into account and used in this work. It can be suggested that her own representation of a self is a very careful project of public construction, which has important resonances for this particular study.

The reverse effect again can be seen in the case of the third woman writer at the centre of this study, George Eliot. She has been almost exclusively 'placed' within the confines of 'the novel' even though she was responsible for many important works of translation, journalistic criticisms, intellectual polemics, and poetry. There is an apparent self-consciousness of this at work during her own lifetime when, in her letters she writes about her poetic drama, *The Spanish Gypsy*, which is to be analysed during this study. She cites the writing of Balzac as one of the justifications she has made to herself for this change of form. 'When I want the world to praise my novels, I write a drama: When I want them to praise my drama, I write a novel'³¹. Similar to *Home Influence*, *The Vale of Cedars* and *Deerbrook*, *The Spanish Gypsy* has received very little critical attention during the twentieth century despite its obvious success at the time of publication in 1868.³² Even in the twentieth century extremely highly regarded works of Eliot criticism largely ignore *The Spanish Gypsy* and the

1991, p. 1034.

³¹ George Eliot, letter to John Blackwood, 30 July, 1868, quoted in Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London, 1985, p. 350.

³² Gordon Haight provides the following information on the sales and editions of *The Spanish Gypsy*, in his book, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1985, p.405/406, 'Of the first edition 2,000 copies were printed, selling at 10s. 6d, and a cautious second edition of 250 copies, incorporating a few corrections, was issued in August...a third edition of 1,000 was printed; and a second 1,000 from stereotype plates answered the demand for the poem for the next five years. In the United States, however, Ticknor and Fields sold over 8,000 copies of it, paying the author 1s. for each'.

work is passed over or subsumed into a few lines of comment.³³

The final selection for Mary Kingsley has been rather more obviously straightforward because of the comparative smaller number of publications by her, even though in terms of articles and lectures she can also be seen as prolific in her short lifetime. *Travels In West Africa* is however publicly regarded as exactly that, a travel log of her adventures in West Africa. But it is also important through close reading to see how this text can be regarded as having a dual perspective or interpretative possibility - as both a fictional tale of adventure but also the narrative of a life - or half a life. The second half of her life, that which was lived in Africa rather than England, and that which she regarded as the 'real life' is explored in more detail in Chapter Five of this study.

In any study which is attempting to make links between individual lives and social context there are several problematics which present themselves with regard to interpretative modelling and issues of normative disciplinary scholarship practices. Through using the dynamics of the research on autobiographical scholarship alluded to previously in this chapter, these can be minimised whilst at the same time retaining that discursive element between questions of history and narrative, 'truth' and fiction, objective and subjective. What also can be kept in view is the need to raise further questions with regard to issues of 'self-hood' and identity, construction and representation. Just as Ursula King's work mentioned earlier raises issues with respect to research into gender and religion leading to her very useful notion of 'participatory hermeneutics', so Linda Peterson's work on *Victorian Autobiography* has been extremely useful in thinking through further the autobiographical mode as having what she terms a 'hermeneutic imperative'.³⁴ Linda Peterson's book is a study of five Victorian writers and their 'autobiographical' texts - Thomas Carlyle's, *Sartor Resartus*, John Ruskin's, *Praeterita*, John Henry Newman's, *Apologia pro vita sua*, Harriet Martineau's, *Autobiography* and Edmund Gosse's, *Father and Son*. Through a reading and critical analysis of these her project is to note the use and change of form with regard to writings about the self. However, what is also highly significant, by way of omission, is the lack of explicit discussion with regard to issues of gender differentiation in particular with relation to religious matters and debates.

In her introduction Linda Peterson is concerned to evaluate various methodologies with respect to the tradition of 'writing about the self' and outlines what she calls the hermeneutic

³³ An exception to this trend is Bernard Semmel, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994. In Chapter 5, The Disinherited Races, Semmel spends fifteen pages outlining the plot of *The Spanish Gypsy* and making links between this text and some of the novels by George Eliot.

³⁴ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University

imperative. She notes how 'Victorian autobiographies had to contend with a generic tradition that had developed from the spiritual autobiographies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and with the methods of imagining and interpreting the self that that tradition had shaped'.³⁵ In her particular study of the above mentioned individuals she is concerned to see how they dealt with the 'curious paradox': that autobiography, apparently the most personal and individual of literary genres, is in fact a highly conventional, even prescriptive form, and that its generic conventions shape our ways of thinking about the most private spaces of our lives'.³⁶

Peterson then uses an analogy to explore two particular ways in which literary historians have engaged and analysed autobiographical writings,

For most literary historians, the history of autobiography as a genre begins either with a mirror or a book. Those who choose the mirror tend to see the genre as one of self-presentation; for them autobiography begins when the Renaissance man learns to make mirrors and receives reflection back from the glass he has created. Those literary historians who, in contrast, choose the book tend to treat the genre as one of self-interpretation; autobiography begins for them in the act of reading, initially the book of Scripture but later other books of autobiography, and this act of reading provides the versions of history that autobiographers then use to interpret the lives they tell.³⁷

Peterson then provides a very clear trajectory of these different approaches with the self-presentation model (the mirror) originating in France with the publication of Rousseau's, *Confessions*. Autobiography however as self-interpretation (the book) she suggests is within an English tradition and can be dated back to John Bunyan's work, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, 1666. This present study will work to disrupt this apparent divide through the insertion of at least one further approach -the self via narrative or more specifically to suggest that the very act of narration happens in and through language and thus needs to be analysed. This line of enquiry has been heavily influenced by the early structuralist writings of the French critical theorist and cultural commentator, Roland Barthes. He has highlighted the centrality of narrative to an understanding of both the world we live in and the meanings we can derive from them through various strategies of reading. Barthes notes how,

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances - as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present

Press, New Haven & London, 1986. See the first chapter entitled, 'The Hermeneutic Imperative'.

³⁵ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p.2.

³⁶ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p.2.

³⁷ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p.3.

in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's *Saint Ursula*), stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.³⁸

Barthes continues in this essay, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', to provide a means of analysing different kinds and types of narrative formations. His arguments help to demonstrate how to begin to make connections and arguments across these very different forms but also how to avoid falling into a trap of seeing all narratives as the same or that narrative is insignificant. He suggests that it is important to follow,

a deductive procedure, obliged first to devise a hypothetical model of description (what American linguists call a 'theory') and then gradually to work down from this model towards the different narrative species which conform to and depart from the model. It is only at the level of these conformities and departures that analysis will be able to come back to, but now equipped with a single descriptive tool, the plurality of narratives, to their historical, geographical and cultural diversity.³⁹

The inclusion of this work on narrative analysis is crucial and provides an important framework. It also acts as a link to the articulation of the self with respect to gender and religion because, for example, although Peterson outlines the tradition of spiritual autobiographies from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries using the framework which John N. Morris provides in his study, *Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John Bunyan to John Stuart Mill*, Peterson takes 'on trust' much of the language of these studies without fully exploring their significance with regard to gender and spirituality which is ultimately at the heart of this study. Morris had, for example, suggested that the spiritual autobiographies 'valued the private and the inward more highly than the public and the outward',⁴⁰ Peterson, then notes how we now call this sensibility 'Romantic' but that Morris takes it further and suggests that actually this sensibility 'is at root religious'.⁴¹ The development of this interpretation means that by the beginning of the nineteenth century (the period under investigation here) Morris can assert that 'Self became the modern word for

³⁸ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath, Fontana, London, 1977. The essay, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', p.79.

³⁹ Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath, Fontana, London, 1977, p. 81.

⁴⁰ John N. Morris, *Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John Bunyan to John Stuart Mill*, quoted in Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p. 3.

⁴¹ John N. Morris, *Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John Bunyan to John Stuart Mill*, quoted in Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*,

soul'.⁴² This statement in itself works to endorse and work with the shorthand overview of the nineteenth century as one which moved from the religious to the secular discussed earlier in this introduction if one is to take a literal view of the transition of 'soul' to 'self'. What this present study wants to investigate is how the arguments of the 'self' are still intrinsically linked with ideas and arguments about 'the soul' rather than one merely replacing or superseding the other.

Peterson however, can be seen to continue Morris's approach by then beginning to explore what she calls 'the continuity of method' from Bunyan to the Victorians. She calls this the 'hermeneutic',

hermeneutic first in the sense that it foregrounds self-interpretation rather than narration or self-expression, but hermeneutic also in the sense that it appropriates its principles and strategies of interpretation from biblical hermeneutics. The designation "hermeneutic" recognises that autobiography distinguishes itself as a genre by the act of interpretation rather than the act of presentation, that its emphasis lies in the understanding of events rather than in the art of narrating them⁴³

This aspect of Peterson's work is obviously one which is contested in this thesis which is concerned to investigate the relationships between hermeneutics, representation, narrative and cultural contexts. It is therefore suggested that the act of presentation of the self is equally significant in any attempt to read autobiographical narratives of the nineteenth century in order fully to acknowledge a wider understanding of the politics of presenting a public self by these women writers. Peterson, herself, retreats from her earlier position in her desire to note also how, 'The fact of autobiography includes both presentation and interpretation', and how this 'creates a continual temptation to ignore or blur the distinction'.⁴⁴ She notes how critics have actually looked at autobiographical works as a variant of the novel using the key work of Wayne Shumaker,⁴⁵ who classified autobiographical writings into three modes: the expository, the narrative and a 'mixed' transitional mode that was common in the Victorian period.⁴⁶ Shumaker's thesis was that by the nineteenth century the form of autobiography had undergone a 'gradual evolution throughout the nineteenth century from exposition to fully novelised

Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986. p.3.

⁴² John N. Morris, *Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John Bunyan to John Stuart Mill*, quoted in Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p. 3.

⁴³ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p.4.

⁴⁴ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986., p.4.

⁴⁵ Wayne Shumaker, *English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials and Form*, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1954.

⁴⁶ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p. 5.

form'.⁴⁷ Shumaker's model, Peterson notes, is then taken up by Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography*,⁴⁸ who then raises questions of 'narrative fiction versus historical truth'.⁴⁹ Pascal, for instance, uses the novels, *Villette*, by Charlotte Bronte and *David Copperfield*, by Charles Dickens as representative of autobiographical novels. Peterson is obviously unhappy with this progression and accuses the literary historians of creating 'a past that never was' ⁵⁰ when perhaps she might have challenged Pascal in respect to transposing narrational acts. Peterson is, however, very good at reminding us twentieth century readers of our comfort in using evolutionary metaphors in a Post-Darwinian age, metaphors inappropriate to transplant onto some of the texts with which this work is concerned to analyse. Peterson is also pertinent in the way she wishes to note the demise of the spiritual autobiography in the twentieth century even though they were plentiful in the nineteenth century. She reminds us that,

before considering the causes of that demise, however, we need first to trace the ascendance of the spiritual autobiography as the primary form of autobiographical writing in the Victorian era and to understand its connection with a specific method of biblical hermeneutics, whose strategies for interpretation the autobiographer adapted almost directly in his attempt to discover the meaning of his life. For by calling the autobiography "hermeneutic," I mean also to suggest that the genre depended upon - perhaps originated in - a particular system of hermeneutics known as typology. ⁵¹

It has been necessary to quote Peterson at length here in order to demonstrate how this project endorses but also presents a challenge to some of these apparently neat assumptions about autobiographical discourse. Having noted earlier the missing elements of construction, narrative and language, there is also a profound absence or silence of how the context of the autobiographical writer would be profoundly shaped according to certain cultural indices. Gender, race, class, location are important and it is these missing points which feminist scholarship on autobiography has made a new platform for debate. Some of the most pertinent of these are raised by Robyn R. Warhol who notes the importance of the 'relationship between authorship and authority and the related quest for a 'voice'. The bonds and divisions between the individual woman and the family, community and culture around her give her the sense of a double or divided self'.⁵²

⁴⁷ Wayne Shumaker quoted in Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, Routledge, London, 1960.

⁴⁹ Roy Pascal quoted in Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p.5.

⁵⁰ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p.5.

⁵¹ Linda Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, p.6.

⁵² Robyn R. Warhol, introductory essay on "Autobiography", Robyn R. Warhol & Diane Price Herndl,

One of the ways in which it has been possible to evaluate and question some of these connections has been through the employment of the trope of 'travelling'. This metaphor of movement and development can be seen as highly pertinent to the 'journeys' of self-hood and self-presentation undertaken by these women. It is also an essential element in the *representation* of journeying *into* selfhood offered within the narratives of their fictions as well as within the subtext of their lived experience. The writings of James Clifford have noted the usefulness of 'travelling' as an investigative mode because of the ways in which it immediately transports us into a vast range of territories and inter-connecting issues. In his essay, "Travelling Cultures" Clifford justifies his use of this modelling: 'I hang onto 'travel' as a term of cultural comparison, precisely because of its historical taintedness, its associations with gendered, racial bodies, class privilege, specific means of conveyance, beaten paths, agents, frontiers, documents, and the like'.⁵³ Later in this same essay he suggests that another interesting comparative term to work with is that of 'pilgrimage' because, 'it includes a broad range of Western and non-Western experiences and is less class and gender-biased than travel'.⁵⁴ Clifford does note the limitations of 'pilgrimage' however with the tendency for, 'its sacred meanings tend to predominate - even though people go on pilgrimages for secular as well as religious reasons'.⁵⁵ He ends this comparative evaluation by the statement that, 'in the end, for whatever reasons of cultural bias, I find it harder to make 'pilgrimage' stretch to include travel than the reverse'.⁵⁶ In many respects both of these terms for cultural comparative studies would appear, in the first instance, to be appropriate and relevant to this particular study. All four women can be seen as infected with religious ideas about actual 'pilgrimages' from their studies in religion as well as embarking upon personal journeys in pursuit of knowledge and experience. Their literary texts can also be read as pilgrimages in terms of plot and language. But, ultimately, Clifford's evaluation of the limitations of pilgrimages over travelling for comparative analysis is true when there is an attempt to work between the secular and the religious aspects as well as the public and the private. To 'travel', then, in the case of these women denotes not only their physical journeys across the globe, their narrative representations but also can be useful in plotting their intellectual journeys towards

(eds.), *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1991, p.1033.

⁵³ James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures', Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson & Paula Treichler, (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 110.

⁵⁴ James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures', Lawrence Grossberg et al, (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1992, p.110.

⁵⁵ James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures', Lawrence Grossberg et al, (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1992, p.110.

⁵⁶ James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures', Lawrence Grossberg et al., (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1992, p.110.

selfhood and self-identification. 'Travel' also carries within it 'an inextinguishable taint of location by class, gender, race, and a certain literariness. It is a good reminder that all translation terms used in global comparisons -terms like culture, art, society, mode of production, man, woman, modernity, ethnography- get us some distance and *fall apart*'.⁵⁷ Implicit here are the elements of intercultural cross-over mentioned previously of public and private, male and female but also those trajectories of 'well-known' and famous to obscure or marginal. These issues can be further extended in the final evaluation of the comparisons between the women with regard to ordinary/extraordinary, unique/representative and so on. What Clifford's work does not embrace here are the particularities of certain configurations of time, space, gender and narrative which is at the heart of this project. Other writings have also tended to treat 'the traveller' and travelling as generic terms that describe male and masculine behaviour and social practices; 'in the multiple paradigms of the journey plot, adventure, pilgrimage, exile, for example, women are generally excluded, their absence establishing the world of the journey as a realm in which man confronts the "foreign". Women (like Penelope) serve as the symbolic embodiment of home; often, however a female figure (like Circe) may signify the foreign itself'.⁵⁸

This argument has a further dimension when it is suggested that, 'Indeed, the plot of the male journey depends on keeping woman in her place. Not only in her place at home, but she, in effect, is home itself, for the female body is traditionally associated with earth, shelter and enclosure'.⁵⁹ The previous discussion of the nineteenth century ideologies of middle-class femininity are also implicated here then with the Ruskinian woman of the hearth and home representing the static, fixed security of place and nationhood. The male adventurer and traveller in the world signifies not just the family breadwinner but also the encodement of the imperialist project of discovery and conquest of other lands. There are also connections between the actual travelling of the male across the globe i.e. within the public world, and the reception and representation of their endeavours as 'Great Men of Letters' in their recorded observations and literary productions. Both the actual travel and the later documents are positioned as central, important and dominant portrayals of, not only their lives, but of their times. Male observations and representations are therefore offered as *the maps* of the nineteenth century and their legacy has been profound in the epistemological trajectory of the period and since. To put this in another way, 'to varying degrees all the studies of adventure

⁵⁷ James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures', Lawrence Grossberg et al, (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1992, p.110.

⁵⁸ Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages, Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1994, Introduction, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages, Women and Travel in British Literary Tradition*, Cornell

and travel ...encode the traveller as a male who crosses boundaries and penetrates spaces; the female is mapped as a place on the itinerary of the male journey',⁶⁰ i.e. the private domain. This can be seen as underpinning the ideology of 'the angel in the house' as well as the consequent ideas about a woman's sphere and issues of space and propriety. In the employment of these ideas in recent scholarship these dominant ideologies remain relatively unquestioned or, at the very least, unproblematised. It is forgotten in the deployment of 'the angel' (i.e. the angel in the house) as a motif that 'angels', biblical and mythological, are also normally associated with mobility. Angels are often represented flying and thus, the suggestion here that 'angels' travel.

The employment then of 'travelling towards selfhood'⁶¹ works also to disrupt the stereotypes of passive middle class women as 'angels in the house'. For by acknowledging female mobility during this period one is also acknowledging the extending territories of their own knowledge and of their further influence. All four women in this study were travellers. Their literal journeys as well as their literary ones are well documented and recorded in their letters and journals. They all write about their travels across the globe from the position of English women abroad and this is a further under-explored area of commentary during a period of rapid expansionism and imperialism, except by Mary Kingsley who has much to comment upon the project of imperialism. For them it appears that travelling elsewhere also provides a freedom to be and to write in a different way as is given testimony through an analysis of their personal writings as well as their public texts. All four women employ travel as a metaphor of experience and self-revelation and discovery. It can also be suggested that for all these women religious belief was the starting point of their travels, both personal, in terms of identity, and that more publicly linked to questions and issues of transformation, of self and of society. It is

University Press, Ithaca & London, 1994, p.1.

⁶⁰ Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages, Women and Travel in British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1994, p.2.

⁶¹ It is also important to add here the particular resonance given to the motif of travel by one of the women writers under investigation here. George Eliot employs this motif in many of her letters to her friends both in relation to her actual travels but also with respect to her journeys of knowledge and religious belief. See for example, George Eliot's letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 8 May, 1869, Gordan Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven &

these 'journeys' of transformation that provide the focus for subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two Grace Aguilar 1816-1847

The notion of 'greatness' or 'importance' is actually a historical, temporal and above all political product associated with particular persons but not others. It is no accident or coincidence that the 'great' and 'important' ...are almost invariably people at the top of stratification systems based on sex, class, race and religion. In feminist and cultural political terms, however, the 'obscure' can be at least and are sometimes considerably more significant historically than the famous or infamous.¹

Grace Aguilar is the subject of this chapter and unlike the other women at the centre of this thesis, she is a relatively 'obscure' figure to contemporary scholars and readers today. This was not the case during her own lifetime, or immediately after what can be seen as a tragic premature death, when her works were considered 'best-sellers' of their time. Primarily, Grace Aguilar, can be placed with hindsight as a novelist of popular narratives. As such she inhabits a period in the history of English Literature which bridges the writings of women like Fanny Burney, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen to those of the mid-nineteenth century of the Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot. Kathleen Tillotson notes how this period is the 'silent' one in most excavations of women's literary production.² This is important because of the denial of a continuum of networks and influences of and between women during this early part of a century. A period in the past which is now hailed as the century when women writers came into their own and established a central place within the novel as a form of cultural production.³ For the purpose of this study it is of interest that this period is now not 'silent' but is one where two women at least from this research can be seen as significant contributors - Grace Aguilar and Harriet Martineau. The latter is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. It has to be acknowledged though that by emphasising the literary contribution of women such as these, there is also the continued danger of not viewing their work in the wider intellectual context. This particular study is concerned to make connections between the literary productions and the religious affiliations and intellectual contributions made by these significant women writers.

Just like the other women writers at the heart of this project, Grace Aguilar is also more than just a novelist in any straightforward or simplistic notion of this label for she is also classified by some as an historian. In her early career she also produced poetry and other forms

¹ Liz Stanley, *The auto/biographical I*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992, p.8.

² Geoffrey & Kathleen Tillotson, *Mid-Victorian Studies*, University of London, The Athlone Press, London, 1965, Introduction.

³ Rosalind Miles in her book, *The Female Form: Women Writers and the Conquest of the Novel*, Routledge, London, 1988, presents a series of arguments which outline the debates about women writers and how they have been positioned. She notes how, 'the developments of the nineteenth century were to be crucial both for women who were writing and for the novel itself', p.35.

of writing.⁴ These aspects are important because of the way in which they centre upon Grace Aguilar's religion, Judaism. In her historical writings and in her fictional works the connecting thread of concern is the multiple ways she attempts to explain, explore and extend knowledge in relation to the Jewish peoples and their social traditions as well as their religious beliefs. What is also of interest here however is the way in which Aguilar uses different forms of writing to present different versions of these traditions and behaviours. For example there is a notable contrast between her 'historical' writings, which work to present histories of the Jewish faith and peoples and her fictional works. The latter, in the main, appear to be more concerned to persuade the reader of the abilities of the Jewish people to assimilate and be part of the British or English way of life rather than to plot the differences between the indigenous and immigrant communities.⁵ This introductory investigation of her productions is thus extremely important in widening our understanding of the connections between gender, religion and writing at this time.

Grace Aguilar was a very prolific writer during her short life, dying, as she did at only thirty-one years of age. The range of her work raises a number of questions with regard to issues of femininity, knowledge and writing because of the apparent eclectic nature of her writing output. The following listing perhaps is useful in highlighting these aspects. The following publications by Grace Aguilar appeared during her lifetime, *The Spirit of Judaism* (1842), *Records of Israel* (1844), *Women of Israel* (1845), *The Jewish Faith* (1846), *History of the Jews In England* (1847) and *Home Influence, A Tale of Mothers and Daughters* (a novel, 1847). The trajectory of interest indicated by these displays Grace Aguilar's movement away from factual, historical texts towards fictional presentations or perhaps more precisely, the ways in which she can be seen to have utilised historical contexts and materials as the foundation for her later literary representations. This becomes even more evident on reading and researching into the work which is published posthumously. These works include, *The Vale of Cedars or, The Martyr, A Story of Spain in the 15th Century* (1850), *The Mother's Recompense* (1851), *The Days of Bruce, A Story of Scottish History* (1852), *Woman's Friendship, A Story of Domestic Life* (1853), *Home Scenes and Heart Studies* (1853) and finally, *Sabbath Thoughts and Sacred Communings* (1853). All of these are fictional works. However, what is also pertinent, is Grace Aguilar's constant involvement in analysing and presenting information to her audience about the place of women in society in general and

⁴ Janet Todd, (ed.), *Dictionary of British Women Writers*, Routledge, London, 1991 places Grace Aguilar as 'novelist, historian', p.5.

⁵ This case is slightly more difficult to establish in the case of the novel, *The Vale of Cedars or The Martyr. A Story of Spain in the Fifteenth Century* which was published posthumously in 1850. A discussion of this text in more detail appears later in this chapter.

within the Jewish faith and the Jewish cultural traditions in particular. This distinction is important to keep in view because scholars of Judaism remind us that there is a tendency to misappropriate information and alignments when studying Judaism, which work to distort or disturb emphasis and meaning. Nicholas de Lange maintains that, 'from a Jewish point of view' there are serious considerations to take into account in making distinctions between Jewish faith and Jewish life traditions.⁶ He continues by suggesting that,

What the objections boil down to is a feeling that Judaism is misrepresented as being essentially the same kind of thing as Christianity or Islam, and a particular source of difficulty here is the concept of religion. Judaism is often described by Jews as being 'not so much a religion, more a way of life', and what this saying reveals is a deep-seated unease about the definition of Judaism as a religion.⁷

De Lange's thesis is concerned to investigate and position these misunderstandings and shortcomings with regard to their consequences within a contemporary twentieth century context. They are relevant to the study of Grace Aguilar because her endeavours in print can be seen as a previous generation's concern to make known these differences and distinctions. Her work is also important because it predates ideas that have been claimed by researches into mid and late Victorian context of religious debates on the centrality and importance of knowledge about the Jewish people and their faith. Much academic work has focused upon this later period and whilst the work has been extremely useful in demonstrating the tensions that develop between the various groupings within the Jewish community in Britain at this moment in cultural history, it can be seen as limited in providing a fully adequate mapping of what had happened before this time. David Englander's work in this area has established the complexity of arguments entailed in the study of nineteenth century Judaism in Britain. He writes that "Nineteenth century Jewry contained equal diversity. 'The difference between the Jews of one country and the Jews of another', wrote one mid-Victorian commentator, 'is almost as great as that between one nation and another'".⁸ Englander also makes the point that the degree of 'acculturation and assimilation, then as now, is determined not only by the internal composition and structure of the Jewish minority, but depends in no small part upon the character of the receiving society'.⁹ Eugene C. Black in the introduction to his book, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry 1880-1920*, provides a very useful and concise outline of the context of British

⁶ Nicholas de Lange, *Judaism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985, p.3.

⁷ Nicholas de Lange, *Judaism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985, p.3.

⁸ David Englander, 'Anglicized not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain', Gerald Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, Vol.1. *Traditions*, Manchester University Press in association with The Open University, Manchester, 1988, p. 236.

⁹ David Englander, 'Anglicized not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain', Gerald Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, Vol.1. *Traditions*, Manchester University Press in association with The Open University, Manchester, 1988, p.237.

Jewry,

Few in numbers and rigorously managed, British Jewry had nevertheless become, by the nineteenth century, a subtly diverse and mobile community. The oldest group, generally Sephardi Jews of Spanish and Portuguese ancestry, migrated to England principally from Holland during Cromwellian and later Stuart years of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This Sephardic oligarchy, intimate, highly structured and mutually reinforcing dominated Anglo-Jewry from the resettlement into the nineteenth century.¹⁰

And it was from this Sephardic tradition that Grace Aguilar descended. The part that she has played in contributing to this period has been, until now, lost to the debates within the histories of Judaism. In part this can be explained by the tendency for such histories to be accepting of or contributing to an andro-centric view of the past, focusing on the activities and experiences of Jewish men.¹¹ Ellen M. Umansky outlines these tendencies and concludes that in many studies of Jewish history, 'the word Jew is clearly synonymous with "male Jew"'.¹²

Grace Aguilar's writings on the role of women also predates the more famous debates and public discussions on 'The Woman Question' that emerge in the mid Victorian period. A claim can be made that further research into Grace Aguilar and others like her, could provide a breadth and depth to current scholarship, particularly with regard to the emergence of early forms of feminism¹³. The research in this area at present has tended to focus almost exclusively on women in Britain who are placed within a context that emerges from Christian traditions of thought. Their thought and writings are then inserted within this particular framework with respect to their intellectual networks and connections. An excellent example of scholarship in tracing these links is Jane Rendall's, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*.¹⁴ Rendall's work however is also an example of the privileging of the 'Christian' context of these debates and there is no mention of other religious denominations and possible similarities or differences. So, in this way, Grace Aguilar is an important figure in that she appears to bridge a 'gap' not only within literary scholarship but also within the charting of the history of feminist thought within Britain. If one adds to this Grace Aguilar's publications on Judaism as well, it is perplexing to note her obscurity from scholarship until now except, perhaps, if one keeps in mind the fact that it is only a very recent

¹⁰ Eugene C. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry 1880-1920*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988.

¹¹ Ellen M. Umansky, 'Feminism in Judaism', Arvind Sharma and Katherine Young, (eds.), *Feminism and World Religions*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999 outlines this debate in more detail.

¹² Ellen M. Umansky, 'Feminism in Judaism', Arvind Sharma and Katherine Young, (eds.), *Feminism and World Religions*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999, p.189.

¹³ The publication, during this research, of Michael Galchinsky's book on *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, can be seen as an invaluable contribution to these debates.

¹⁴ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, Macmillan, London, 1985.

phenomenon for scholars to work across disciplinary boundaries. Michael Galchinsky raises particular points about the erasure of Grace Aguilar's contribution in the introduction to his book, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*¹⁵ and these will be discussed later in this chapter. Derek Gregory writing in 1989 noted the development of inter-disciplinary study and the impact of it. He writes,

The intellectual scene is changing fast. Concepts of place, space and landscape have become central to some of the most exciting developments across the whole field of the humanities and the social sciences. Where historians and anthropologists once studied individual actors and isolated communities, they now seek to place people in a shifting web of interdependencies which often stretch across the globe...Philosophers and intellectual historians are alert as never before to the significance of 'local knowledge' and to the wider contexts in which their arguments move.¹⁶

It is on these borderlines of culture that new insights can be found for Edward Said reminds us that it is through an excavation of these borderlines and their overlapping and intertwined histories that previous 'consolidated vision' can be challenged. In *Culture and Imperialism*, he suggests that we need to take cognisance of the following factors when engaged within these areas,

The crucial aspect of what I have been calling the novel's consolidation of authority is not simply connected to the functioning of social power and governance, but made to appear both normative and sovereign, that is, self-validating in the course of the narrative. This is paradoxical only if one forgets that the constitution of a narrative subject, however abnormal or unusual, is still a social act par excellence, and as such has behind or inside it the authority of history and society.¹⁷

This is important with regard to Grace Aguilar's position to date as a woman, as a Jew and as a writer because her position is of someone who was working on these very borderlines of culture which challenge certain authorities of history and of society. Said offers further food for thought with regard to the positioning of Grace Aguilar when he outlines the ways in which different kinds of authority are further laid out in relation to the author, the fictional voice, and the societal context. He writes,

There is first the authority of the author-someone writing out of the processes of society in an acceptable institutionalised manner, observing conventions, following patterns, and so forth. Then there is the authority of the narrator, whose discourse anchors the narrative in recognisable, and hence existentially referential, circumstances. Last, there is what might be called the authority of the community, whose representative most often is the family but also the nation, the specific locality, and the concrete historical moment. Together these functioned most energetically, most noticeably, during the early nineteenth century as the novel opened up

¹⁵ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996.

¹⁶ Derek Gregory, Foreword, Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning*, Routledge, London & New York, 1989.

¹⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage, London, 1994.

to history in an unprecedented way.¹⁸

These issues have profound resonances for this study of Grace Aguilar. It could be suggested that the disappearance from view of her life and works and the appreciation of her as an important figure in her own day are closely linked to her historical position on the borderlines of culture. The placing of Grace Aguilar then within a whole series of debates and issues is part of this larger intellectual framework which seeks to work across traditional disciplinary boundaries in order to evaluate and question debates about power, gender and the construction of knowledge.

Brief biography

Here, this descriptor of 'brief' holds a particular irony because, through the years of obscurity, there has been very little detail on the life of Grace Aguilar. Unlike the other women in this study there appeared to be, at the beginning of this research, no published biographies, and no left letters or diaries. It was essential to work initially between the glimpses or fragments of Grace Aguilar's life as provided by two main but fairly brief 'outlines' of her life¹⁹. One, an entry on Grace Aguilar in Janet Todd's, *Dictionary of British Women Writers* and the other an unacknowledged *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*. The latter appears with other introductory information within the opening pages of one of her novels, *Home Influence: A Tale for Mothers and Daughters*, which itself will be considered in this chapter. In fact, it can be conjectured further that the Todd entry is largely derived from this *Memoir* with some small additional research provided. It is further suggested that the *Memoir*, though unattributed may be the work of Grace Aguilar's mother, Sarah Aguilar, who can be seen to have been responsible for keeping her daughter's work in print following Grace Aguilar's early death. Sarah Aguilar is also the person who promotes the publication for the first time of many of her daughter's later works. These aspects need to be kept in mind when presenting the minimal remnants of Grace Aguilar's brief life story.

Grace Aguilar was born in Hackney in London on June 2nd, 1816. She was the eldest child and the only daughter of Emanuel Aguilar who is described in the *Memoir* as, 'one of those merchants descended from the Jews of Spain, who, almost within the living memory of man, fled from persecution in that country, and sought and found asylum in England'²⁰. This

¹⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage, London, 1994, p.92.

¹⁹ This situation has since changed with the publication of Michael Galchinsky's study, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996. Much of the research he provides is founded upon the collection of Grace Aguilar's work held at University College, London. Galchinsky provides the historical background to this collection, 'The numerous diaries and notebooks of Grace Aguilar were first collected by Ruth Beth Zion Lask Abrahams and bequeathed to the Jewish Museum at the beginning of the twentieth century'.

²⁰ *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, (unattributed, but assumed Sarah Aguilar), within the opening pages of

depiction of Grace Aguilar's inheritance is very important in the way that it places her and her family within the longer Jewish historical frame within world history. A history where the experience of displacement, dispersal and diaspora are common features to individual lives. It also places the Aguilar family as Sephardic Jews as opposed to Ashkenazi Jews of central and/or Eastern European origin and places their history within the context of the Spanish expulsion of all Jews in 1492.

The specific cultural legacy figures again in this study in chapter four on George Eliot. Part of the chapter is concerned to analyse, *The Spanish Gypsy*. This epic poetic drama by George Eliot also utilises this event of the expulsion from Spain. It provides the historical backdrop for her characters and their fictional struggles with regard to questions of belonging, issues of gender, power and religion. This moment in the past is also represented as the background to one of Grace Aguilar's novels, *The Vale of Cedars or The Martyr* published in 1850 and mentioned earlier in this chapter. One point which can be raised here then is the question of how certain cultural phenomena are kept alive within society - either through lived experience and actual inheritance or through creative imaginings, such as the literary, of these questions of displacement and segregation. Also, how these overlapping territories can be missed in more orthodox single discipline scholarship. A further question being raised here within the context of the nineteenth century is why do two very different women writers, from very distinct cultural backgrounds become drawn to the particular historical events in fifteenth century Spain? For Grace Aguilar this interest could be offered as arising out of her family's past and her own autobiographical inheritance whilst for Eliot it was perhaps part of her explorations into foundations of knowledge and the quest for origins. Grace Aguilar's family history of expulsion and migration with England as the site of sanctuary and comfort is significant in then reading how she utilises these aspects in her writings to answer, or at least explore, questions about self identity, religion and ideas of 'belonging'. It can also be seen to problematise some ideas about national identity and individual inheritance which is a factor shared by all women in this study who are all 'English' but have different relations to this aspect of their identity.

The Aguilar family remained living in Hackney until 1828 when they moved to Devonshire ostensibly 'for the health of her father'²¹. It can be conjectured that Grace herself was also in poor health. The Memoir records how, 'from the age of three years, she was almost

Grace Aguilar's *The Mother's Recompense, A Sequel to Home Influence*, 26th edition, Groombridge & Sons, 1876, London, p.x.

²¹ *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, (unattributed), within the opening pages of Grace Aguilar's, *The Mother's Recompense, A Sequel to Home Influence*, 26th edition, (Groombridge & Sons, 1876, London), p.xii.

constantly under the care of some physicians, and by their advice, annually spending the summer months by the sea, in the hope of rousing and strengthening a naturally fragile constitution'²². Another consequence of this tendency to ill health was that Grace Aguilar's education was largely carried out at home under the instruction of her mother and father except for eighteen months when she had the benefit of formal schooling. We are informed that Grace kept a journal from the early age of seven years old, which she continued throughout her life. In common with the other women in this study, this early writing can be seen as a means of self discovery and identification and we are told, again in the *Memoir*, that the diary was used to record also early experiments in writing drama, essays and historical pieces. At twelve years old she wrote a play entitled, *Gustavus Vasa* and whilst this was 'never published...it provides the germ of what was afterwards to become a ruling passion'²³. This was to be followed by poetry about nature as the *Memoir* records how, on moving to Devonshire, 'she constantly collected shells, stones, seaweed, mosses etc., in her daily rambles and also studied and recorded these findings'²⁴. So, whilst we are told that her bodily health was feeble this cannot be said about Grace Aguilar's mental development and her instruction and endeavours in reading and writing appear to be the main thread of her life.

The *Memoir of Grace Aguilar* does, however, read at times like an essay in contradictions. Whilst there are very strong claims of illness and frailty as mentioned previously, there are also images which present Grace walking robustly in the countryside on her collecting rambles as well as records of her delight in singing and dancing. These latter public displays seem at odds with earlier testimonies of someone who has to be locked away from the world because of illness. Bearing this in mind it is also interesting to note how the pleasures of performance arts were to be sacrificed by Grace on the wishes of her mother, 'A wish was once expressed by her mother that she should not waltz, and no solicitation could afterwards tempt her'²⁵. This example is offered to highlight the young daughter's filial piety and sense of duty towards her parents but it can also be read, unwittingly perhaps, as an early act of self sacrifice and self renunciation in order to seek approval or to fit into the wishes of others. These are important elements for a woman who later in her novels is asking her readers to follow this pathway to femininity.

At the same time as Grace Aguilar foregoes the pleasures of singing and dancing we are told that her mother begins to require her to read sermons and to study religion. Grace is instructed to read the Bible and it is recorded that, 'this was readily submitted to first as a

²² *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, p.xi.

²³ *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, p.xii.

²⁴ *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, p.xii.

²⁵ *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, p.xii.

task, but afterwards with much delight' according to the writer of the *Memoir*.²⁶ There is supporting evidence to this claim however from Grace Aguilar herself in the second volume of her publication, *Women of Israel*,

This formed into a habit and preserved in for a life, would in time, and without labour or weariness, give the comfort and the knowledge that we seek: each year we should discover something knew not before, and in the valley of the shadow of death, feel to our heart's core that the Lord our God is truth²⁷

This lifetime of religious study and devotion we are also told was not solely for personal reasons and that Grace Aguilar was concerned to embrace the principles of all creeds in order to actively help and support others within her local community. This dutiful life continued but when Grace was nineteen her attentions were brought much more inwardly to help look after her mother who had become ill following an operation. Although Grace had two brothers, these had left the family home and so Grace was the sole support. It is interesting to note that she, like two other women in this study, Harriet Martineau and Mary Kingsley, fulfilled this role of the dutiful daughter whilst at the same time using the gaps in the care regime to embark upon some of her early writing projects. During her mother's illness she wrote a tale called (perhaps aptly?), *The Martyr*, her first full length book, *The Spirit of Judaism* and also translated at the request of a friend a book called, *Israel Defended*. The latter was printed but solely for private circulation. What these endeavours bear testimony to are the skills and attributes of a young woman educated at home, not only within her own culture and its history but also in the accomplishment of other languages. Michael Galchinsky makes much of this home education of Grace Aguilar. He claims that 'through the matriarchal structure: the oral traditions of the Cypto-Jews were passed down from mother to daughter in the domestic space because the traditionally male Judaic public spaces (such as the Synagogue and yeshiva) had been closed down'.²⁸ He suggests also that this 'Cypto-Judaism was a secret, domestic Judaism, hidden from the outside world as if by a veil'.²⁹ This home education for women is a common but often unacknowledged feature of many nineteenth century women's lives and leads to further questions about what we actually know about the 'hidden' knowledge resources of largely middle class women during this period. All the women in this study were to a greater or lesser extent self educated or mainly educated within the domestic sphere and one wonders where, in fact, their own mothers gained their education and knowledge which was

²⁶ *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, p.xiii.

²⁷ Grace Aguilar, *Women of Israel*, Vol.2, (Groombridge & Sons, London,1845),p.43.

²⁸ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p. 137.

²⁹ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p. 137.

then passed on to their daughters. This area could begin another project on the hidden curriculum of female education during this earlier part of the nineteenth century.

In the spring of 1835 a series of events worked to make Grace Aguilar more vulnerable and yet, at the same time, more responsible for some of the members of her own family. Firstly, she herself contracted measles and the effects of this left her with what are described as, 'bouts of unexplainable tiredness'³⁰. Whilst she was medically encouraged to rest and does spend some time recuperating at the seaside she returned to further turmoil in the family. Her elder brother now left England to undertake further studies in Germany whilst her younger one was determined to embark on a career at sea. Like Mary Kingsley, Grace delighted in the tales of her younger brother on his returns from travelling but she also found it difficult to have to say goodbye and take on the full time role of responsible daughter for her ailing mother and father. The latter was now dying of consumption and actually, 'breathed his last in her arms, and the daughter, while sorrowing over all she had lost, roused herself once more to the utmost, feeling that she was the sole comforter beside her remaining parent'.³¹

Throughout all of these events Grace managed to sustain her own work and completed her book, *The Jewish Faith* and prepared for press her first novel, *Home Influence* which will be discussed later. Her younger brother, ultimately, decided to give up his career as a midshipman and through Grace's publishing contacts secured himself a post with 'a powerful friend'. Her own health was still poor and on doctor's orders she set sail for her first trip to the Continent to stay with her brother in Frankfurt in Germany. She set off in June 1847 (also the dates of the first editions of her *History of the Jews in England* and *Home Influence, A Tale for Mothers and Daughters*), but fell ill again whilst in Frankfurt. From there she was sent to Schwalbach to the baths and mineral waters but even though she stayed six weeks these were not successful and she returned to Frankfurt after another bad spasm. She took to her sickbed and within three weeks was dead. Grace Aguilar is buried in Frankfurt cemetery, one side of which is set apart for the people of her faith. The stone which marks the spot bears upon it a butterfly and five stars, emblematic of the soul of heaven, and beneath appears the inscription: 'Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates' (Proverbs.ch 31: v 31)³²

Michael Galchinsky reminds us that these words are 'taken from the famous passage on the ideal woman ("Eshet Chayil") in Proverbs 31, constantly quoted by reformers and was a fit epitaph to this prolific reformer's life'.³³

³⁰ *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, p.xiv.

³¹ *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, p.xiv.

³² *Memoir of Grace Aguilar*, p.xv. Grace actually dies on 16th Sept 1847. Age 31.

³³ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origins of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p. 139.

Two different sides of Grace Aguilar and the Jewish Tradition

At the early stages of this research the intention had been to use one literary representation by each of the women writers at the centre of this study to evaluate and introduce themes and issues with respect to gender, religion and writing. Grace Aguilar's first novel, *Home Influence, A Tale for Mothers and Daughters* published in 1847 was to have been the representative text under investigation.³⁴ This was because of the case that can be made for it as an example of the literary form being used to convey an ideology of the benefits for Jewish women to assimilate into the dominant English culture. However, as research progressed and it was possible to gain readership of other works by Grace Aguilar it seemed necessary to extend this method of approach and to include a further work by her. This seemed crucial in order to raise issues about a contradictory position that appears to be offered in a later novel, *The Vale of Cedars or, The Martyr: A Story of Spain in the 15th Century*, published in 1850, after Grace Aguilar's death³⁵. This latter text has been recorded, in the entry on Grace Aguilar in Janet Todd's *Dictionary of British Women Writers*, as being one which offers a picture of a Jewish Utopia but this judgement is actually not as straightforward as it might at first appear. For, *The Vale of Cedars* is at heart a novel about resistance by the female Jewish protagonist, who will sacrifice her life and the love of others in order to maintain her faith. The second title or preface to it, *The Martyr*, is thus an adequate signifier of the depictions contained. The title also however works to offer us two contradictory interpretations of the main character so that one can read the utopian nature of the text if utopia means integrity and isolation rather than deceit and community. These matters will be explored later in this chapter but it has been established that in order to provide a more complex interpretation of Grace Aguilar's writings with respect to the images of Jewishness two of her novels are offered as examples.

At the beginning of the Groombridge and Sons edition of *Home Influence: A Tale for Mothers and Daughters*, Grace Aguilar writes a Preface that can be seen as having a dual purpose. It provides both an outline of her previous writing career and the reception of these works but it also begins to establish a different emphasis for this first work of fiction. She writes in the third person and claims that

She is only anxious to impress two facts on the minds of her readers. The one - that having been brought before the public principally as the author of Jewish works, and as an explainer

³⁴ Michael Galchinsky, in *The Origins of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, records that 24 editions of *Home Influence* had been published by 1869, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, p.139.

³⁵ *The Vale of Cedars* went into 29 editions with the last one printed in 1916 according to Michael Galchinsky in *The Origins of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p.139.

of the Hebrew Faith, some Christian mothers might fear that the present Work has the same tendency, and hesitate to place it in the hands of their children.³⁶

This initial sentence appears to indicate the possibility of her fictional writings being already predetermined by her audience and there is a suggestion that her Jewishness may be seen as something to be 'feared'. The Preface then works in this instance to reassure her readers of her sameness to them rather than her difference as she continues,

She, therefore, begs to assure them, that as a simple domestic story, the characters in which are all Christians, believing in and practising that religion, all doctrinal points have been most carefully avoided, the author seeking only to illustrate the spirit of piety, and the virtues always designated as the Christian values thence proceeding. Her sole aim, with regard to Religion, has been to incite a train of serious and loving thoughts towards God and man, especially towards those with whom He has linked us in the precious ties of parent and child, brother and sister, master and pupil.³⁷

Grace Aguilar therefore does not want her faith to be a barrier to her readers and what she is desirous to present here is a commonality between the Jewish and the Christian faith of familiar piety and respect in the way that God has ordained. These are very much the words one would expect from someone attempting to voice the virtues of acculturation and assimilation of the Jewish people within British culture.

It is also important to note here that at the time of writing this, 1847, the Jewish population of Britain continued to grow both from indigenous procreation but also from continued immigration. David Englander notes how the figures for, 'the Anglo-Jewry population registered a twenty five fold increase during the course of the eighteenth century and expanded at a steady, if less spectacular, rate thereafter.'³⁸ He provides the following population information on the numbers of Jews in Britain to further support this statement: 1800 - 25,000; 1850 - 35,000; 1880 - 60,000. He also notes how, 'The original Sephardic settlers from Spain and Portugal (1656) had long since been submerged beneath a ceaseless stream of Ashkenazi immigrants from Germany, Poland and Holland'³⁹ and that, 'At mid-century, the Sephardim comprised perhaps 13 per cent of the Jewish population of London.'⁴⁰ These figures suggest two things that are significant to any attempt to 'place' Grace Aguilar within the nineteenth century context of British Jewry. They signal the continuation of Britain as a place of perceived refuge for Jews who are under pressure to leave their own countries. It

³⁶ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence, A Tale for Mothers and Daughters*, Groombridge and Sons, London, 1872, unnumbered preface.

³⁷ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence, A Tale for Mothers and Daughters*, Groombridge and Sons, London, 1872, unnumbered preface.

³⁸ David Englander, "Anglicanized not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain", Gerald Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, Vol.1. *Traditions*, Manchester University Press, in association with The Open University, Manchester, 1988, p.240.

³⁹ David Englander, "Anglicanized not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain", p.240.

also works perhaps to establish the differences between Jewish groups, which is often hidden in general discussions of the topic of their presence in British history. The Sephardic Jews of which Grace Aguilar is a descendant are also, numerically, in decline and Englander goes on in this same essay to suggest that, 'the distinctions which had once separated the two communities had lost much of its force'.⁴¹

What Englander may be referring to here is the fact that, 'Despite the differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, ascribable to a large extent to the wider cultures of Christianity and Islam and their effect on Jewry, they share in common the basic elements of rabbinical Judaism which characterized it from the time the second temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.'⁴² The customs of the two communities are different but Alan Unterman is instructive in pointing out that, 'the ritual practices of both follow the rulings of the sixteenth century code of *halakhah*, or religious behaviour, the *Schulcan Arukh*.'⁴³ He also points out that whilst their methods of teaching delivery may be different the actual content of the religious education provided is 'essentially the same'.⁴⁴ This religious education is focused upon 'intensive study of the *Babylonian Talmud* and its commentaries and to a lesser extent of the Hebrew Bible and its commentaries'.⁴⁵ He explains that,

The beliefs of both Ashkenazim and Sephardim turn upon the same typological images: the redemptive acts of God in history as exemplified in the Bible, promising the final redemption at the dawning of the messianic age; the special role of Israel as the people with whom God has entered into a covenantal relationship and to whom he has given his teaching or Torah; the need for the Jew to affirm the unity of God, negate all idolatrous thoughts or practices, and obey the *mitzvot* or commandments of God contained in the Bible and in the oral teachings of the rabbis.⁴⁶

This liberal interpretation however does perhaps work to mask the fact that within a British nineteenth century literary context there appears to be more concern with representations of Sephardic Judaism than with Ashkenazi. (This is exemplified in Grace Aguilar's works but also with George Eliot's, *The Spanish Gypsy*, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.) This may be explained in the longer intellectual and culturally rich history of the Jews in Spain and Portugal in the Middle Ages. Unterman suggests that they 'were eventually to give Sephardi-oriental Jewry its distinctive culture (because they) were at the forefront of the two great movements that formed mediaeval Judaism: the synthesis between

⁴⁰ David Englander, "Anglicanized not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain", p.240.

⁴¹ David Englander, p.240.

⁴² Alan Unterman, "Judaism", in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, John R. Hinnells, (ed.). Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, (1984), 1998 edition., p.24.

⁴³ Alan Unterman, "Judaism", in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, p.24.

⁴⁴ Alan Unterman, "Judaism", in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, p.24.

⁴⁵ Alan Unterman, "Judaism", in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, p.25.

⁴⁶ Alan Unterman, "Judaism", in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, p.26.

Judaism and Greek philosophy; and the most important stream of the Jewish mystical tradition, the Kabbalah.⁴⁷ Unterman continues this explanation noting that,

The most outstanding product of medieval Jewish philosophy was *The Guide for the Perplexed*, written towards the end of the twelfth century by Moses Maimonides. Maimonides grew up in Spain but fled with his family from the persecution of a fanatical Islamic sect, spending most of his mature life in Egypt. The Guide reinterprets biblical and Talmudic (i.e. rabbinical traditions of the early Christian era) teachings in Aristotelian terms, emphasizing that many of the descriptions of God found there are anthropomorphisms which must not be taken literally, for any belief in God's corporeality is heresy. Maimonides also explains the function of Jewish rituals in terms of the historical situation of the biblical Israelites, and the need for man to be refined in his moral outlook and his beliefs to perfect himself in the service of God.⁴⁸

This point appears worthy of emphasis because of the ways in which the moral value and worth of an individual is a constant feature of Grace Aguilar's fictional writings under discussion here. The moral dilemmas of the central characters, usually female, are the driving force of the narrative plots.

Unterman is also obliquely illustrating in his work on the Jewish tradition the ways in which the British context is one located within the wider intellectual debates of Western Europe (in particular the effects of the Enlightenment). This might also explain the dominance of concentration upon the Sephardic traditions within British literature. The debates concerning questions of unity or diversity within Anglo-Jewry in this period are highly complex and still under consideration from a variety of perspectives. The claims made to date with respect to growing unity between the different groups during the nineteenth century could be based upon the existence of The Board of Deputies of British Jews. This had 'evolved from the Committee of Diligence appointed in 1746 to watch over the interests of British Jews'.⁴⁹ This had been 'organised co-operatively by Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews at the accession of George III in 1760 as the London Committee of the Deputies of the British Jews'.⁵⁰ Eugene C. Black notes how this organisation was both an 'oligarchic parliament' and 'the principal institution through which Jews as an organised body interacted with the British Government and wider British public'.⁵¹ This public body may provide an impression of unity and association which was far from the case later in the nineteenth century when the massive influx of Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe opened up areas of tension and diversity. These late nineteenth century debates appear on a superficial level to be concerned with the perceived differences between these

⁴⁷ Alan Unterman, 'Judaism', in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, p 26.

⁴⁸ Alan Unterman, 'Judaism', in *A Handbook of Living Religions*, p.26.

⁴⁹ Eugene C. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880-1920*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, p.38.

⁵⁰ Eugene C. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880-1920*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, p.38.

⁵¹ Eugene C. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880-1920*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford,

'new' immigrants to Britain and the more settled and established Sephardic members of the community. One of the key areas in which these differences became manifest was that of social order and matters of philanthropy. The more established Sephardic British Jews had apparently provided for members of their communities who were in need but were reluctant to extend their money and efforts to aid the newcomers who they appeared to blame for their own fate and who were regarded as 'the strange poor'.⁵² Whilst this later context is outside the period in which Grace Aguilar was writing her early writings do give credence to the model of Jews 'caring for their own' with many of the characters in her novels being embraced, when they fall on hard times, by their family and friends.

Grace Aguilar also continued to try, in the Preface of *Home Influence*, to offer reassurance to her readers as to her motives and aims as an author as well as pointing out some of the rationale behind the style of her presentation. She states,

The second point she is desirous to bring forward, is her belief, that in childhood and youth the spoken sentiment is one of the safest guides to individual character; and that if, therefore, she has written more conversation than may appear absolutely necessary for the elucidation of "Home Influence", or the interest of the narrative, it is from no wish to diffuse, but merely to illustrate her own belief. SENTIMENT is the vehicle of THOUGHT, and THOUGHT the origin of ACTION. Children and youth have very seldom the power to evince character by action, and scarcely if ever understand the mystery of thought; and therefore their unrestrained conversation may often very greatly aid parents and teachers in acquiring a correct idea of their natural disposition, and in giving hints for the mode of education each may demand.

This section then endorses the aims of the text in terms of its emphasis on sentiment as the impulse for thought and action and in part fits into a romantic tradition of literary representations of the child in a state of playful innocence. It also works to predetermine the novel as a text which aims to educate and this is highly significant because Aguilar here seems to inhabit a similar space to those early nineteenth century women writers of educational and etiquette texts aimed at mothers and their daughters⁵³. It is also very clearly stated here that

1988,p.38.

⁵² Eugene C. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880-1920*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988,p.72.

⁵³ The most famous of these being Sarah Stickney Ellis who published a whole series of texts devoted to women's roles in the domestic sphere which included, *The Women of England, their social duties and domestic habits*. This text has no publication date recorded within it but was published by Fisher, Son and Co, Angel Street, London and has a preface signed by the author and dated 1839. In this Preface Ellis is concerned to demonstrate that her book is important because it is addressed to all women and not just to ladies and that it has an important moral and Christian basis, '...I do believe, that, with the Divine blessing, a foundation may be laid in very early life, before the heart has been illuminated by Divine truth, or has experienced its renovating power, for those domestic habits, and relative duties, which in after life will materially assist the development of the Christian character'. She continues by concluding that, 'It may perhaps more fully illustrate my view of this important subject, to say that those who would train up young people without the cultivation of moral habits, trusting solely to the *future* influence of religion upon their hearts, are like mariners, who, while they wait for their bark to be safely guided out to sea, allow their sails to swing idly in the wind, their

these aspects of sentiment, thought and action are perceived as universally shared by all denominations and are not peculiar to either Jews or Christians. This education of the emotions is also further endorsed as Grace Aguilar continues,

leaving the beaten track of words written for the young, the author's aim has been to assist the education of the HEART, believing that of infinitely greater importance than the mere instruction of the MIND, for the bright awakening of the latter depends far more on the happy influence of the former than is generally supposed.

The final section of Grace Aguilar's Preface is directed in particular at mothers whom she recognises are the readers she has in mind. These will perceive the full moral importance of the narrative where the aspects of good and bad mothering explored in *Home Influence* are representations of the importance of the everyday domestic acts and responsibilities that all mothers have to perform. She addresses too the daughters who will read the novel and her hopes that they too will learn the centrality of their roles as women within the private sphere. Grace Aguilar ends the Preface by noting, 'Opportunities to evince the more striking virtues women may never have, but for the cultivation and performance of the lesser, they are called upon each day'. This statement could well become an overarching statement for women's writing of the nineteenth century *per se* where the female heroine has her responsibilities outlined for the sake of others in her care. The position taken here by Grace Aguilar therefore appears to endorse David Englander's arguments that for most British Jews in the nineteenth century the attraction was towards the adoption of an 'integrationist strategy' where 'Anglicanization and acceptance rather than separatism and self-sufficiency constituted its dominant concerns'.⁵⁴ Michael Galchinsky's study of Grace Aguilar also supports this view but with a slightly different emphasis. He maintains that, Grace Aguilar was concerned to argue in her writings that 'Jewish women can share intimacy with Christians and even with Christian theology without losing their Jewishness because they retain their difference in form'.⁵⁵

Home Influence, A Tale for Mothers and Daughters

The first edition of this novel by Grace Aguilar was published in 1847 in London by Groombridge and Sons but it is the 1872 edition which has been used for the purposes of this research with its additional *Memoir of Grace Aguilar* discussed previously in this chapter.

cordage to become entangled, and the general outfit of their vessel to suffer injury and decay; so that when the pilot comes on board, they lose much of the advantage of his services, and fail to derive the anticipated benefit from his presence'.

⁵⁴ David Englander, 'Anglicized not Anglican: Jews and Judaism in Victorian Britain', G. Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol.1. Traditions*, Manchester University Press in association with The Open University, Manchester and New York, 1988, p.239.

⁵⁵ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p.144.

The novel is set in Wales at a time stated as 'twenty or thirty years ago' in a central location of 'a very beautiful part of Wales, between the northern boundaries of Glamorgan and the south-eastern of Carmarthenshire'.⁵⁶ The setting is 'a small straggling village' which appears to be cut off with its 'locality almost completely concealed'.⁵⁷ This peaceful idyllic setting has recently seen the arrival of a private carriage that had contained a 'poor lady' and her two children, 'believed to be shipwrecked off Pembroke'.⁵⁸ The opening chapter then proceeds to outline in more detail the chief aspects of this woman and her children and the reason for her journey home to this village of her childhood. It emerges that she is Mrs Eleanor Fortesque and that 'from her childhood has been a creature of passion and impulse, and maternity had unhappily not altered one tittle of her character'.⁵⁹ From this one sentence the main focus of the novel is brought to the fore - the importance of good mothering - and the dangers that can occur when the mother is at fault in the training and upbringing of her children. The reader is told of how Eleanor Fortesque has travelled home for the last time as an act of some desperation because she is on the verge of dying and needs someone to care for her two children after her death. The children, Ellen and Edward have also been treated very differently by their mother with Edward being his 'mother's idol', the object of 'lavish indulgence since birth'.⁶⁰ Ellen, by contrast, we are told is 'a study of repressed emotion' and who has had 'no love from her mother whom she cared for but irritated'.⁶¹ Eleanor is hoping that her sister, Emmeline Hamilton and her brother in law will look after her children but is also concerned that as 'strict disciplinarians' will not indulge her son in the way that she has. In order to protect him she extracts a promise from her long suffering and neglected daughter that she will 'shield him, and save him from harshness'.⁶² The extraction of this promise is a pivotal moment of the novel and the reader is made fully aware of this by the narrator's comment, 'in what manner, or what cost, Ellen might be enabled to keep that promise, never entered her mind'.⁶³

Ellen's role and status in the novel is thus set up as one of suffering and sacrifice for the sake of others, in this case, her brother Edward. Throughout the novel Ellen's character is framed by biblical narratives which work to shape and make clear the authorial intentions for the reader to interpret the story in a context of faith and belief. For example, we are offered the following representation of Ellen who 'had been so frequently told that she did not know what

⁵⁶ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence, A Tale for Mothers and Daughters*, Groombridge & Sons, London, 1872, p.1. (hereafter referred to as *Home Influence*)

⁵⁷ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.1.

⁵⁸ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.3.

⁵⁹ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.6.

⁶⁰ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p. 4.

⁶¹ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p. 9.

⁶² Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.5.

⁶³ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.6.

affection was, that she was so inanimate and cold, that though she did not understand the actual meaning of the words, she believed she was different to anyone else, and was unhappy without knowing why'.⁶⁴ When she raises the question to the village vicar, 'if people are good they are happy so why isn't she?', he reminds her of the story of Joseph who was taken away from his father and made a slave but through maintaining his faith in God and God's love, through prayer was returned to his brother and father again. Ellen's response is one framed within the social family rather than the religious one as she retorts that 'Joseph was his father's favourite child'.⁶⁵ For her, Joseph was sustained in his belief and faith by the knowledge that his own father loved him whereas she could not believe in God's love because she had not experienced the supporting love of her own mother. The vicar responds with a warning that 'being a favourite will not always make us happy'.

The narrative unfolds from this early beginning to present a series of tests to Ellen with regard to the keeping of her secret promise to her mother to guard and protect her brother. A promise which has been repeated at her mother's death bed and thus becomes the main object of Ellen's life believing that in fulfilling her mother's last wish she is demonstrating her love. The almost exaggerated importance that the young Ellen gives to this promise has been further compounded by the last wishes of her father whom we are later to learn has actually also died in the arms of his daughter on the battlefields of India. His words to Ellen were that she was 'under all circumstances to love, to cherish and obey your mother'.⁶⁶ Ellen is to carry out the wishes then of both her dead father and her dead mother. This brings her much suffering and thus as a character Ellen is an early depiction of what is to become a dominant nineteenth century trope of femininity in fiction - the woman who suffers in silence. She also is representative of the images of women who sacrifice any identity for themselves for the sake of others. Yet, in the novel, to her aunt, Emmeline Hamilton, Ellen also represents 'a riddle' to be solved because Emmeline observes she is 'unlike any child she had ever known or seen before'.⁶⁷ In the depiction of this contradiction between ideal stereotypes of femininity and the actual cost to trying to live out an idealised position Grace Aguilar provides an early example of a feminist intervention into the harm of religious orthodoxy if this is misinformed or misinterpreted. The key figure in this debate is that of Emmeline who offers the correct way to be both religious and a mother.

With the development of the narrative Grace Aguilar is able to depict a number of different representations of femininity, which fall within now commonly recognised nineteenth

⁶⁴ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.9.

⁶⁵ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.11.

⁶⁶ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.19.

⁶⁷ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.16.

century fictional paradigms. In her depiction of the sisters, Eleanor and Emmeline there is the common framework of opposites, the good and the bad sister. The good sister being one who is dutiful to her parents and her siblings and who, through religion in Emmeline's case is able to have foundational tenets by which to live by. The bad sister, Eleanor, is one who has no regard for others feelings and has followed her own desires and passion on impulse with no thought of the consequences or implications of her actions. We are told that Edward's favoured treatment and indulgence from his mother is in one sense history repeating itself within the family. Eleanor had been the favourite indulged child by her own father following the death of their mother, whilst Emmeline had turned to religion, 'which enabled her to bear up against care and the constant and most painful feeling of loneliness'.⁶⁸ Their lives had also been different with regard to their participation in the public social world of their aristocratic connections. Emmeline found her entrance into society painful whereas Eleanor wanted nothing more than to be the centre of social events and to live in the presence of the rich, famous and socially elevated. Emmeline is 'saved' from society life by marrying before she is twenty, Arthur Hamilton who is represented as a man sure of his own faith and convictions and an honourable man who is concerned to champion the cause of others and to help those who are less well off. The narrator tells the reader how Emmeline had 'always longed for one to reverence, to cling to, and her husband gave her room for both'.⁶⁹ Emmeline thus presents a version of the archetypal woman in nineteenth century fiction whose main focus of attention is home and hearth. The domestic sphere is one of her control and influence and her management of this private sphere places her beyond and above the contamination of public matters. In this way Emmeline is one of the earliest depictions in fiction of what is later to become John Ruskin's model of femininity presented in his essay 'Of Queen's Gardens' with woman as the 'moral custodian of culture'. It is the debate between John Ruskin and John Stuart Mill, which will be then used by later scholars to debate the 'Woman Question' of the nineteenth century. What is important in these earlier fictional works by women like Grace Aguilar is the fact that these images and debates had been played out on an earlier stage and had been given a different emphasis when offered by women themselves. In the later debate there has become a secularisation of the debate on woman and whilst there is emphasis on morals and sanctity, the particular framework of religion has been silenced or removed. This is particularly the case with the depiction of the Hamilton's marriage that Grace Aguilar offers in *Home Influence* if due consideration is given to Aguilar's own Jewish background. As Eugene Borowitz argues,

⁶⁸ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.26.

⁶⁹ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.29.

The Jewish community has found no more central and significant form for the individual Jew to live in than the personal covenant of marriage. In its exclusiveness and fidelity it has been the chief analogy to the oneness of the relationship with God as the source of personal worth and development. In marriage's intermixture of love and obligation the Jew has seen the model of faith in God permeating the heart and thence all one's actions. Through children, Jews have found the greatest personal joy while carrying out the ancient Jewish pledge to endure through history for God's sake.⁷⁰

This view of Jewish marriage is also based upon the wider acknowledgement within the formulation of Jewish law by the rabbis of the Talmud that women and men 'were created with absolute dignity, equality and worth'.⁷¹ This is not to say however that equality meant sameness because 'they argued, through a kind of divine economy, God created men and women as complements to one another. By nature, in other words, men and women were meant to occupy different societal roles so that together they might achieve wholeness'.⁷² The presentation of Emmeline Hamilton's character and role within the home as wife, mother and companion falls into such a view. This specifically Jewish tradition of separate but complementing spheres for the sexes shares many of the features of the Christian version of marriage where the gender roles are seen as mutually supportive and harmonious. Both, however, are formulated within a wider patriarchal discourse of gender relationships with woman confined to the private sphere in a state of dependence and obedience to the male. It is this aspect in Grace Aguilar's writing that Michael Galchinsky maintains is determined by her Sephardic heritage. A heritage which provided her 'with a maternal oral tradition' which was to become 'the basis for Aguilar's idealisation of the maternal and the domestic'.⁷³

The depiction of the bad sister, Eleanor, in *Home Influence*, also works as a warning to female readers by Grace Aguilar to guard against being ruled by their passions and impulses. Whilst Emmeline's sanctuary is the domestic sphere and her main concern is to raise her children 'with more regard to their spiritual and moral welfare than even the cultivation of their intellect'⁷⁴, Eleanor courts passion and attention from men and plays their attentions off against each other. When secretly engaged to one man, she elopes to India with Captain Fortesque, leaving behind her a trail of public scandal and the suicidal death of her former lover. Eleanor is possibly also an implicit depiction of the potentially dangerous state of female independence that can exist in the passage of time between being under a father's control and

⁷⁰ Eugene Borowitz, *Exploring Jewish Ethics*, in Laura Levitt, *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home*, Routledge, New York and London, 1997, p.76.

⁷¹ Ellen M. Umansky, 'Feminism in Judaism', in Arvind Sharma & Katherine K. Young, (eds.), *Feminism and World Religions*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999, p.180.

⁷² Ellen M. Umansky, 'Feminism in Judaism' in Arvind Sharma & Katherine K. Young, (eds.), *Feminism and World Religions*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999, p.180.

⁷³ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p. 161.

that of a husband. Rachel Adler discusses this further in *Engendering Judaism, An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, where she maintains that,

This dangerous obliteration of boundaries is the transgression called *gilui erva*, forbidden sexual exposures, which, like idolatry and murder, disorder and pollute the gnostic world. Rabbinic espousal - *kiddushin* - bridges the girl's passage from her father's hands to her husband's. This transfer procedure is designed to prevent the anarchic and world-disordering expression of autonomous female sexuality that could occur during the dangerous hiatus between these two statuses of daughter and wife, when a girl might consider herself in her own independent domain.⁷⁵

Eleanor thus rebels against the standards of femininity set by her sister and believed that 'religion was never meant for such as herself, that its restrictions should never enter her mind, or its dictates pass her lips'.⁷⁶ Her self-centred lifestyle continues even after her marriage and the birth of Edward and Ellen although she does worship her son with an 'idolatry' depicted as unhealthy. Eleanor's harsh treatment of her daughter in comparison gives rise to an authorial intervention which makes clear the author's belief in early years education as the foundational elements of an individual's life. In this sense Grace Aguilar comes across as a 'modern' writer on childhood rearing practices as she notes, 'The power over early years is so immense, its responsibility so extensive, that its neglect or abuse may indeed make the earnest thinker tremble...'.⁷⁷ Eleanor's abuse of her daughter is represented in extreme ways, for example in one instance she abandons her daughter and takes her son to safety during an outbreak of fever. She also is more concerned for herself and Edward to attend a party than to accompany her husband to a new settlement where he has to command a new station, leaving her daughter to go alone. It is on this trip that they are surrounded by 'brown devils'⁷⁸ and Fortesque is killed. Ellen is with him when he dies amidst a scene where, 'death in its most horrid form was all around her; her little feet were literally deluged in blood, and she frequently stumbled over the dusky forms and mangled and severed limbs that lay on the grass...'.⁷⁹ Ellen suffers all of this in silence and with this display of endurance for his sake we are offered a further depiction of the self - abnegation she has trained herself in from an early age.

The contrast between these early years of almost sensational endeavour for Ellen in a foreign country, (at the sight of battle and beside the deathbed of her father), with the household events of the Hamiltons provides the novel's pace and canvas of judgement with regard to good and bad parenting - particularly mothering as has been stated earlier. Emmeline

⁷⁴ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.45.

⁷⁵ Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism, An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1999.

⁷⁶ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.49.

⁷⁷ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.52.

⁷⁸ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.57.

provides a tranquil home where the days were framed by family prayers and her efforts channelled to provide the right education of all the children under her care. The following passage provides an example of the narrative format given to such episodes,

Mrs Hamilton earnestly longing to implant a love of Nature and all its fresh, pure associations in the minds of her children while yet young, knowing that once obtained, the pleasures of the world would be far less likely to obtain too powerful dominion. That which the world often terms romance, she felt to be a high pure sense of poetry in the Universe and in Man, which she was quite as anxious to instil as many mothers to root out. She did not believe that to cultivate the spiritual needed the banishment of the matter of fact; but she believed, that to infuse the latter with the former would be their best and surest preventive against all that was low and mean; their best help in the realization of a constant unfailing piety. For the same reason she cultivated a taste for the beautiful, not only in her girls but in her boys - and beauty, not in arts and nature alone, but in character. She did not allude to beauty of merely the high and striking kind, but to the lowly virtues, struggles, faith and heroism in the poor - their forbearance and kindness to one another - marking something to admire, even in the most rugged and surly, that at first sight would seem so little worthy of notice. It was gradually, and almost unconsciously, to accustom her daughters to such a train of thought and sentiment, that she so particularly laid aside one part of the day to have them with her alone; ostensibly it was to give part of their day to working for the many poor, to whom gifts of ready-made clothing are sometimes much more valuable than money; but the *education* of that one hour she knew might, for the right cultivation of the heart, do more than the mere *teaching* of five or six, and that education should come from her alone.⁸⁰

This model of education and its holistic nature also makes Grace Aguilar appear a more modern writer than at first might be apparent. It also places her firmly in the debates about childhood and knowledge that arose from the Romantic period and which has been depicted in the works of William Wordsworth amongst others. Her views of education and knowledge are also shared by the other women in this study which suggests that the concern to feel as well as to think are established by the nineteenth century as the attributes essential for the future of humanity. These tenets are also firmly established in most of the religious teachings of Judeo-Christianity and the appearance within the novel of numerous biblical homilies endorses the more secular readings that can be drawn. Lessons are delivered through Old Testament readings on falsehood, humility and jealousy and Emmeline Hamilton's strategy for self-knowledge is one of 'prayer, action, reflection and confession'.⁸¹ In the context of the author's own Jewish faith these depictions may be of central importance as a means of authorial intervention and possible feminist subversion of the articulation of the space and function of the mother. By this is meant the subversion of the traditional sphere of religious observance and participation with regard to Judaism being the sphere exclusive to the male. Emmeline's role and active participation and leadership in religious instruction, albeit here in an attempt by

⁷⁹ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.57.

⁸⁰ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.83.

⁸¹ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.203.

Aguilar to acknowledge a Christian context, works to question a Jewish tradition in which 'women's silence if not outright exclusion from biblical stories, rabbinic discussions, and later historical descriptions of Jewish religious and communal life often makes it difficult if not impossible for women to feel part of the Jewish people'.⁸² This position is raised by Michael Galchinsky's work on Grace Aguilar where he points out her own paradoxical position. He writes, 'Aguilar's genuine commitment to assigning women to the sphere of the domestic was in conflict with her genuine desire to have her ideas on the separation of spheres known and acknowledged by the public'.⁸³

Home Influence reaches its dramatic moment when Edward and Ellen are both grown up and Edward has been sent away to sea for a career of anticipated adventure and heroism. The various childhood incidents of lying and deceit which Ellen has been held in suspicion for by her aunt are to deepen when she appears to become even more furtive and withdrawn following her receipt of letters from Edward to which her aunt is not privy. Her brother is holding the promise that she has made to their dead mother in power over her as he tries to extort monies from her to cover his gambling debts. Ellen is presented as so bound by this duty to her dead mother that she takes money that she 'finds' as a sign of help from fate rather than rationalise that she is taking something belonging to others. This money is literally found in the woods - money from heaven - which has been dropped by someone else. When her aunt discovers this act of theft Ellen is placed under solitary confinement because she will not provide a confession or an explanation as to why she needed such amounts of money. Ellen is in a state of mental torture, as she wants to obey her aunt and to have her love and affection. This results in Ellen becoming very ill and her collapse is almost fatal when her brother returns home and eventually confesses the part he has had in bringing his sister to this point. Everything does of course end well and justice prevails. Ellen is reunited back into the hearts and minds of all the Hamilton family and Edward learns the error of his selfish ways in lessons from his aunt. He too is seen as having suffered by too indulgent mothering because it has left him with an incapacity to understand how others might be feeling rather than the self centred view he has had until now. His acknowledgement that 'I never could think her my equal; never could fancy she could have a will or wish apart from mine' is testimony to this and to the accepted position accorded to the young male heir. It is not Edward who ultimately stands accused by this narrative but Eleanor who is described by Emmeline, her sister, as 'a

⁸² Ellen M. Umansky, 'Feminism in Judaism', in, Arvind Sharma & Katherine K. Young, (eds.), *Feminism and World Religions*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999, p.188.

⁸³ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p. 159.

thoughtless, partial mother'⁸⁴ whose lack of attention to the needs and character of her daughter had resulted in a complete distortion of Ellen's personality and disposition. She had come across to others as 'cold, unloving and inanimate' when in actual fact she had silenced herself to hide the faults of others. In effect Ellen had missed out on her own childhood for the sake of looking out for and after her brother. It is left to Emmeline Hamilton to provide the final words on parenting in the novel as she tells Ellen that

A parent does not love and guide her children according to their individual merits...but according to the fountain of love which, to enable her to do her duty, God has so mercifully placed in her heart; and, therefore, those who have the least attractions and the most faults, demand the greater cherishing to supply the place of the one, and more careful guiding to overcome the other.⁸⁵

This domestic tale of moral instruction and the place of justice within the private sphere has much in common with its later nineteenth century counterparts by other women writers. In particular, the writings of Charlotte and Emily Bronte who in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* respectively, are concerned to explore the site of childhood and the repercussions of absent or poor parenting. What is more overt within *Home Influence* is the importance and centrality of God and religious faith as the key determining factor of good parenting. Also, that the main purveyor of moral instruction is the unselfish mother.

The Vale of Cedars or The Martyr, A Story of Spain in the Fifteenth Century⁸⁶

This novel by Grace Aguilar was published after her death in 1850 and provides an interesting dilemma for the researcher keen to 'place' Grace Aguilar's work within a particular intellectual trajectory. Earlier in this chapter it has already been asserted that there are two potential ways of reading this novel either as utopian or fatalistic discourse and here an investigation into the narrative will work to explain this further. The novelist via the narrative voice and its interventions within the text may partly have been aware of this as she guides the reader to certain ways of reading the information that she provides within the historical backdrop to the story. At one point, in chapter xxiii, she is concerned to provide the reader with historical facts of the context of her narrative and actually gives footnote references to the historical sources she has relied upon to offer this. In this instance Grace Aguilar also highlights how she has been concerned to utilise this information within the writing of her romance and how this will have further repercussions. The passage reads as follows,

The fact that the most Catholic kingdom of Spain was literally peopled with secret Jews brands this unhappy people with a degree of hypocrisy, in addition to the various other evil propensities with which they have been so plentifully charged. Nay, even amongst themselves

⁸⁴ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.359.

⁸⁵ Grace Aguilar, *Home Influence*, p.361.

⁸⁶ The Fifteenth edition of this novel, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, by Grace Aguilar published in 1876 by Groombridge & Sons, London is used for references in this section.

in modern times this charge has gained ascendancy; and the romance writer who would make use of this extraordinary truth to vividly picture the condition of the Spanish Jews is accused of vilifying the nation, by reporting practices opposed to the upright dictates of the religion of the Lord.⁸⁷

The author is then concerned to persuade the reader that these interpretations and judgements are to do with ignorance of the past and a tendency to read the past in the context of present values. She continues,

It is well to pronounce such judgment *now*, that the liberal position which we occupy in most lands would render it the height of dissimulation and hypocrisy to conceal our faith; but to judge correctly of the secret adherence to Judaism and public confession of Catholicism which characterised our ancestors in Spain, we must transport ourselves not only to the *country* but to the *time*, and recall the awfully-degraded, crushing, and stagnating position which *acknowledged Judaism* occupied over the whole world.

This section comes almost two thirds through the novel and is here to both explain the dramatic denouement of the story and to also educate the readers into the powerful historical backdrop to this which might, in the context of the assumed nineteenth century reader be lost. Additional information is then offered to the reader from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, summarising the history of the Jewish peoples from the year 600 across the globe but within the Spanish context in particular. She points out that although there had been numerous attempts to expel the Jews from various countries until this point she writes of in fifteenth century Spain,

the tyrants being unwilling to "dismiss victims whom they delighted to torture, or deprive themselves of industrious slaves over whom they might exercise a lucrative oppression;" and a statute had been enacted, "that the Jews who had been baptized should be *constrained*, for the honour of the Church, to persevere in the *external practice* of a religion which they *inwardly* disbelieved and detested".⁸⁸

These interventions are to provide the reader with a position which might make them more sympathetic to the main characters and their actions within this romance, which may initially look deceitful and duplicitous. Two of the main protagonists have had to lie about their Jewish faith and pretend to be upholders of the Catholic religion that dominates Spanish society.

The actual story of *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, is centred round the love of an Englishman, Arthur Stanley whom we are told has become exiled from England because of the War of the Roses and his Catholicism. Being of noble birth he has been adopted by members of the Spanish court and has fought alongside them in their various battles. It is Stanley who literally stumbles upon the hidden Vale of Cedars, which is the sanctuary to a secret Jewish family, the Henriques. He does not initially know their secret but has to be told

⁸⁷ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.189.

⁸⁸ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.190. This section is also acknowledged by

by Marie with whom he has fallen in love that their love is doomed by their difference. The reader is told that on Stanley's first beholding of Marie and his observation of her at a distance that 'to Arthur Stanley she united memory with being, the past with the present'⁸⁹. Here the reader is offered an insight into the link between these two characters who in their different ways have become exiles because of their religion. This is a difference that Marie has to eventually disclose to Stanley because he wants them to marry. She says, 'Be it so, you shall know this impassable barrier. You are too honourable to reveal it. Alas! it is not that fear which has restrained me; my own weakness which shrinks from being to thee as to other men, were the truth once known, an object of aversion and of scorn'.⁹⁰ When Stanley is confronted with the truth of her Jewish faith he is still not convinced that they cannot be together and he claims that he would, 'give up Spain and her monarch's love for thee. I would live in slavery beneath a tyrant's rule to give thee a home of love. I would forget, trample on, annihilate the prejudices of a life, unite the pure blood of Stanley with the darkened torrent running through thy veins, forget thy race, descent, all but thine own sweet self'.⁹¹ His plea is however insufficient for Marie who claims that love is not just about individuals and that, 'There is a love, a duty stronger than that I bear to thee. I would resign all else, but not my father's God'.⁹² In using these depictions Aguilar is suggesting that the links between the patriarchal discourse of Judaism and that of the patriarchal family are both significant in Marie's obedience. She is tied to her 'father's God' through inheritance and obligation as much as through belief. This in itself is an interesting representation of woman's position within religion from this novelist where women are portrayed, 'to conform to domestic ideology and sacrifice their desires at their father's first word for the sake of the community's safety and integrity'.⁹³ The thwarted lover's part and then time elapses and Marie eventually marries her cousin, Don Ferdinand Morales, in a secret Jewish ceremony held in the Vale of Cedars. There is here though a further twist to the narrative plot because Don Ferdinand Morales is actually a Spanish nobleman whom everyone believes to be a Catholic. The two have to undergo a public Catholic wedding ceremony for the benefit of the eyes of the Spanish Court of Isabella and Ferdinand. Both Marie and Morales therefore are the 'secret Jews' whom Aguilar elaborates upon later in her novel. Their secret religion therefore takes over as the key driving force of the narrative from this point and suggests that 'the lesson seems to be that, in Spain, Jewishness

Aguilar as coming from Gibbons', *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol.vi, chap.xxxvii.

⁸⁹ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.8.

⁹⁰ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.10.

⁹¹ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.11.

⁹² Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.11.

⁹³ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p.156.

can only be exhibited safely when concealed in the domestic sphere. For when Jewishness is revealed publically, brutality ensues.'⁹⁴

Marie and her husband live within Court circles and Morales has the friendship of both his King and Queen, monarchs whom Aguilar is concerned to initially depict as ones who have attempted to bring harmony to the Spanish nation,

The internal condition of Spain, as we have before said, had been, until the accession of Isabella and Ferdinand, one of the grossest licence and most fearful immorality. Encouraged in the indulgence of every passion by the example of the court, no dictates of either religion or morality ever interfered to protect the sanctity of home; unbridled desires were often the sole cause of murderous assaults; and these fearful crimes continually passing unpunished, encouraged the supposition that men's passions were given to be their sole guide, before which honour, innocence, and virtue fell powerless.⁹⁵

However, their imposition of order, family values and morality through the values of the Catholic religion are also to have their profound effects upon the main characters of this narrative. Initially, this does not appear to be a threat to Marie and her husband because of their personal friendships with their monarchs. The friendship between the two women, Marie and Queen Isabella is particularly concentrated upon by Aguilar as she writes, 'How false is the charge breathed from man's lips, that woman never admires woman! - that we are incapable of the lofty feeling of admiration of our own sex either for beautiful qualities or beauteous form!' continuing that 'There may be many who can see no charm and feel no interest in girlhood's beauty; but not in such is woman's best and holiest nature, and therefore not by such should she be judged'.⁹⁶ This feminist stance taken on female friendship between an older Isabella and the younger Marie is a central part of the narrative. There is a suggestion that their differences of faith can possibly be surmounted by their friendship and similarity of women with respect to love, marriage, nurturing and the home as the centre of their existence. However the power of this layer of narrative depiction is always under possible threat by the secret of Marie's religious faith being found out. Would her being a Jewess be an impossible state for Isabella to accept as a friend but also as a monarch?

Into a potentially harmonious, if duplicitous, situation two other protagonists appear. One is the figure of the known Stanley who, of course cannot now understand how his Marie can be married to Morales, the Catholic Spanish nobleman when she has told him the secret of her faith. He is depicted in confusion over Marie and,

It was not the mere suffering of unrequited love, it was the misery of having been deceived; and then, when racked and tortured by the impossibility of discovering some cause of this deceit,

⁹⁴ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p.166.

⁹⁵ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.50.

⁹⁶ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p. 67.

her secret would flash across him and the will thought that both he and Don Ferdinand were victims to magic and sorcery, by means of which alone her hated race could ever make themselves beloved.⁹⁷

Grace Aguilar here deploys some common myths about Jewish people and the belief that their behaviours were founded on malevolent forces akin to witchcraft. The character of Marie is now to Arthur Stanley also mysterious and this she acknowledges, 'Mystery as there was around me when we first met, there is a double veil around me now, which I may not lift even to clear myself with thee'.⁹⁸ The employment within literary texts by women writers in the nineteenth century of the use of the veil as a metaphor to explore femininity and female sexuality has been analysed by critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in particular in their work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Here Grace Aguilar presents an example of someone who deploys this strategy as part of the narrative plot. The reader at this point in the novel, is in a privileged position at having the double secret known to them of the secret Jewishness of her husband which Stanley never suspects. The coupling that Grace Aguilar thus is making between the mysterious ways of religious difference and the mysterious nature of women is an early illustration of how both women and minority cultures are coupled together as being oppressed under patriarchal regimes.

The other protagonist is much more sinisterly portrayed - the figure of Don Luis Garcia. At first he is surrounded with mystery, 'whose actual rank and office no one seemed to know; and yet in affairs of church or state, camp or council, he was always associated...his presence generally created a restraint, felt intuitively by all, yet comprehended by none'.⁹⁹ Don Luis Garcia is thus the shadowy character who spies upon others, observing meetings between Arthur Stanley and Marie on the English nobleman's return to the Court and his consternation at the marriage of his once beloved Marie. The reader is told that Don Luis Garcia cannot comprehend love relationships as he has never himself been in love nor felt its importance. Despite his 'austere, even rigid life spent in those acts of piety and personal mortifications enjoined by his religion-voluntary fasts, privations, nights supposed to be passed in vigil and in penance; occasional rich gifts to patron saints, and their human followers' that he still retained an 'absence of all worldly feelings' but was regarded by all as 'a faultless Catholic'.¹⁰⁰

Whilst hinted at throughout the novel, the true identity and role of Don Luis Garcia is not fully revealed until further events have taken place within the narrative. Ferdinand Morales is murdered and the prime suspect for this is Arthur Stanley whose distinctive sword is found

⁹⁷ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.70.

⁹⁸ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.87.

⁹⁹ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.48.

¹⁰⁰ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.49.

with the body. Don Luis Garcia is one of the keen believers in Stanley's guilt because of his observation of the two men quarrelling over Marie as well as his spying on the secret exchanges between Stanley and Marie herself. He has also been the one to warn Morales of his wife's possible infidelity with Stanley. It is, however, Queen Isabella who is the bearer of the news of her husband's death to Marie and the latter's first thoughts on her husband's disappearance is the concern that 'hers and her husband's fatal secret'¹⁰¹ had become known. The latter part of the novel is thus concerned with the trial of Arthur Stanley and the attempts of Marie to save him from an act of violence she is convinced he has not done. The only way in which she can assert his innocence and her own fidelity to her husband is to disclose the fact that she is a Jew and to keep hidden her husband's faith in order to also save his good name and memory within the Spanish Court.

Grace Aguilar depicts the trial in great detail with the role of the king, Ferdinand as the judge and that of the various religious members outlined at some length. The Franciscan monks who

were celebrated alike for their sterling piety, great learning and general benevolence. Their fault, if such it could be termed in a Holy Catholic community, was their rigid exclusiveness regarding religion; their uncompromising and strict love for and adherence to their own creed, and stern abhorrence towards and violent persecution of all who in the slightest degree departed from it, or failed to pay it the respect and obedience which they believed it demanded.¹⁰²

This sets the scene for the reader with respect to the kind of response that will greet Marie's confession of faith. When this moment in the trial comes Marie suggests that her evidence will be 'valueless. I belong to that race whose word is never taken as witness, for or against, in a court of justice. I cannot take the oath required, for I deny the faith in which it is administered. I am a Jewess!'.¹⁰³ The response of the peoples in the courtroom is fairly predictable and described as 'horror, wrath, terror' and fears of 'contamination'¹⁰⁴. The narrative at this point is also concerned to outline that it is just at this point of dramatic public confession that Marie becomes fully aware of the possible extent of her action not just for herself but for others like her.

Danger, not merely from the vengeance of the Church for long years of fraud, nor the secret and awful tribunal of whose existence she was conscious (though not of its close vicinity); not merely these, but danger from the wrath and terrors of the secret members of her own faith, who might naturally imagine their own safety endangered in the suspicion engendered by her rash confession¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.114.

¹⁰² Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.138.

¹⁰³ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.160.

¹⁰⁴ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁵ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.162.

The extent of the harm that she may have brought upon herself and others make her hysterical. This depiction of woman as mad and different has had extensive analysis brought to bear in terms of the signification of 'otherness' given to women and their emotions and behaviours. Again, Aguilar is concerned to utilise these fictional tropes in the associations she wishes to make between gender and religious difference. Stanley is found guilty but given a stay of execution for one month because of the lack of concrete evidence. Marie is to be under the protection of Queen Isabella and may escape punishment if she will accept being re-educated into the Catholic faith and renounce her Jewish principles. Isabella's rationale for this treatment is interesting in terms of female solidarity mentioned earlier,

Unbeliever though she may be, offspring of a race, which every true Catholic must hold in abhorrence, she is yet a *woman*, and as such, demands and shall receive the protection of her queen. Yet, would there were some means of saving her from the eternal perdition to which, as a Jewess, she is destined; some method, without increase of suffering, to allure her, as a penitent and unbelieving child, to the bosom of our holy mother Church.¹⁰⁶

Isabella's defence of Marie and her plea for female solidarity to transcend other differences is again repeated in a warning to her maid Christine who is told to, 'detest, abhor, avoid her faith - far that we command thee; but her sex, her sorrow, have a claim to sympathy and aid, which not even her race can remove'.¹⁰⁷ This determination by Isabella for identification of female attributes and qualities is despite the warnings from her religious leaders that in having 'the abomination of a Jewess residing under her roof, the danger is to her soul'.¹⁰⁸

It is at this point within the text that Grace Aguilar again intervenes in the narrative by placing an explanation for her depiction of Queen Isabella in such a favourable and compassionate light especially as the action of the novel is during the time of the Spanish Inquisition. She writes in a footnote, 'We are authorized to give this character to Isabella of Castile, and annex the nature of such actions to her memory; as we know that even when, by persuasions and representations of Torquemada, the Inquisition was publicly established, Isabella constantly interposed her authority to prevent *zeal* from becoming *inhumanity*'.¹⁰⁹ Of course, what is of interest is how this author presents this aspect of Isabella's humanity in a fictional sense to privilege her knowledge of herself as a woman and its concurrent responsibility to other women. This identification of the female with the role as the upholder of justice and humanity is seemingly a common aspect of Grace Aguilar's writing hitherto discussed. This compassionate presentation of Isabella is also counterbalanced by the authorial comment, later in the novel, that she too became a martyr to her faith and that this

¹⁰⁶ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.172.

¹⁰⁷ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.174.

¹⁰⁸ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.175.

¹⁰⁹ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.177.

helped to explain 'the Inquisition and expulsion of the Jews - deeds so awful in their consequences, that the actual motive of the woman-heart which prompted them is utterly forgotten and herself condemned'.¹¹⁰

With the narrative plot unfolding further against a historical backdrop of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain by royal edict of Isabella and Ferdinand, and the defeat of the Moors, Marie refuses to renounce her faith and she subsequently disappears from the Court. Her disappearance is a mystery and is once again explained by her Jewishness, coupling it again with 'devil's work' and 'sorcery'. It is at first unclear whether her 'escape' has been for her freedom or whether she has been removed for further punishment because the reader is now told the secret of Don Luis Garcia's identity as none other than the Grand Inquisitor. It is actually he who has taken her away to punish and torture her in order to get the names of other Jews who are living in secrecy in Spain. Marie is able to rise above all this abuse and gets strength from prayer, which means that Garcia is 'baffled by her angelic purity' at the same time is abhorrent of her race and religion. His failure to get information annoys him and he places Marie in solitary confinement from which she again disappears. This time helped by one of her own family who has dressed up as one of the Inquisitor's aids in a black cloak and mask.

The narrative ends with Stanley cleared of the murder and returning to England. Don Luis Garcia is disclosed as being an instrument of the Pope in his work to uncover the secret Jews and over whom Isabella and Ferdinand are quite powerless to act except to embrace his organisation publicly to aid their expulsion of the Jews. Marie finally dies - a martyr to her religion. She claims that 'the very scorn and loathing we encounter confirms the blessed truth of our having been the chosen children of our God; and the glorious promise of our future restoration'.¹¹¹ Towards the end of the novel we have the depiction of Marie who could not 'in heart be a Catholic; and so she dared not be in words'¹¹² and the polemical intervention by the author who points out that,

Marie Morales had had many trials. Her life had been one of those painful mysteries, as to why such a being should have been thus exposed to scorn, which while on earth we vainly try to solve. Yet it is no imaginary picture: hundreds, aye thousands, of Israel's devoted race have thus endured; in every age, in every clime, have been exposed to martyrdom - not of frame alone, but of heart; doomed to suffer and to die. And how may we reconcile these things with the government of a loving Father, save by the firm belief - which blessed, are those who feel - that for such sufferers on earth a future of blessedness is laid up in another and lovelier world, where there is no more sorrow no more tears!¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.194.

¹¹¹ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.259.

¹¹² Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.252.

¹¹³ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.252.

With the fictional death of Marie we are told that 'death is as an Angel of Light'¹¹⁴. She can be buried by her family in the Vale of Cedars in the true belief that 'in heaven there is no distinction of creed and faith; we shall all love God and one another there, and earth's fearful distinctions can never come between us.'¹¹⁵ If one were to only read these concluding sections to the novel it might be possible to assert that *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr* was offering a utopian vision of life after death in a heaven where all are equal. However, in an analysis of the novel and its depictions of woman and religious belief it presents a similar and familiar stereotype of femininity to other representations of gender and religion in the nineteenth century. The woman who has to suffer and become a martyr for her faith and to forego any earthly life of passion or fulfilment. So, whilst Grace Aguilar can be seen to have found empowerment through her own faith which results in a successful, if untimely short, career as a popular novelist, her heroines are still depictions of renunciation. Heroines which will appear again in the writings of both Harriet Martineau and George Eliot who are discussed in the following chapters.

What this introductory and partial reading of Grace Aguilar's writings do offer to the nineteenth century intellectual framework are new insights to debates and knowledge which were circulating about religion and gender, specific to the context of Judaism at an early part of the century. The two novels used as illustrative texts within this study also begin to raise a number of issues with regard to the part Grace Aguilar herself was playing in the complex debates about Jewish acculturation and assimilation raised earlier in this chapter. For whilst *Home Influence* can be regarded as a text offering assimilation models of 'shared' values between religious faiths, *The Vale of Cedars* is much more complex. It too can be seen to work with an intention to construct relationships based on commonality, especially between women, in its depiction the friendship between Isabella and Marie but it also acknowledges the obstacle to the potential of this through religious difference.

Grace Aguilar as a woman and as a writer can be seen to demonstrate a profound awareness and acknowledgement of the fact that knowledge, belief and opinion are always situated within specific and concrete socio-historical contexts. This is borne out in both the novels discussed in this chapter where she, as narrator, interrupts the narrative flow to provide guidance and advice to the reader. In her depiction of the situation in Spain in the fifteenth century, for example, she is acutely aware of the different interpretations and perceptions of her nineteenth century readership. She presents her own period as one where more liberal and more tolerant views exist with respect to diversity in religious belief than those of the past.

¹¹⁴ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.281.

¹¹⁵ Grace Aguilar, *The Vale of Cedars; or, The Martyr*, p.284.

This is very significant in relation to the time when Grace Aguilar was actually writing these works because she is raising arguments about religious toleration and plurality which have been placed by Victorian scholars later in this period.

The self-awareness of this writer is also keenly displayed with respect to her representations of gender. Grace Aguilar can be seen as an early exponent of some of the nineteenth century debates, and aspects of femininity and masculinity are key sites of contestation and debate within her novels in terms of expectations of the gender roles placed upon the individual. She raises questions throughout these books, both implicitly and explicitly, about 'gendered' behaviours and emotions and the ways in which these are interpreted within a culture at a specific moment in time. Whilst this study has been concerned to highlight and concentrate upon the representations of women on offer within her novels there are also a number of powerful arguments being made about questions of masculinity and the received versions of these in the past. For instance, in *The Vale of Cedars*, Arthur Stanley is offered in many respects as an archetypal hero, familiar in other nineteenth century literary depictions. Stanley is handsome, powerful and brave but he is also offered as a man who would be willing to renounce his place in society and his public credibility for the sake of the love that he has for Marie. It is Marie who is constructed as the person who will not allow this to happen because of her knowledge and perception that memory and tradition cannot be erased by love. It is Grace Aguilar as novelist then who through her female characters is able to highlight some of the ways in which and by which patriarchal systems are maintained and sustained. Religion is offered as one of the key carriers of these ideological formations and whilst there can be challenges to these values by individual intervention these will still be limited.

Grace Aguilar's work can also be seen as a new contribution to debates on nineteenth century gender relations in the way in which her publications actually predate those of other key figures who are studied in relation to 'the Woman Question'. The concern with the role and responsibility of the woman can thus be seen as a phenomenon *already in debate* by the mid-Victorian period and not something *new* to that period. Also, Grace Aguilar and her writings add further depth to these existing debates by offering us readers of the twenty and twenty first centuries a trajectory which demonstrates the underpinning of the secular debates on women as having *actual* foundation within debates about religion. Grace Aguilar offers this perspective through her arguments about the role of women as wives, as mothers, as daughters and as sisters. Whilst some critics might suggest that this is 'typical' of women and representative of what was (and perhaps still is?) perceived as a woman's sphere of influence it could also be argued that Grace Aguilar is doing something quite different in her articulation of

these spheres of influence for women. Her novels are unusual in their focus on mothers because if one considers other more famous nineteenth century novels these are more usually littered with motherless orphans. Hence, the pivotal role of the mother as a vehicle for education and knowledge that Grace Aguilar utilises as a powerful influence disappears as a dimension in later debates because of the absence of mothers from literary texts. This is an important aspect because it has been suggested in this study that the women who are discussed here have all, in some way, themselves had the benefit of knowledge passed on to them by their own mothers.

The works of Grace Aguilar are also significant for their representations of the potential power between women, both through acts of nurturing and of friendship. An example of this suggested previously was the representation of the potential of the relationship between Queen Isabella of Spain and Marie in *The Vale of Cedars*. The depiction of the possibilities for female solidarity can be read as another attempt by this author to intervene in patriarchal discourse and challenge given stereotypes of female behaviours and practices. Whilst ultimately their friendship cannot 'save' Marie from the insurmountable difference of religion that exists between them, Aguilar seems to suggest that this is more to do with the specific historical moment in which their friendship is situated rather than the limits of female bonding and affiliation. In her characterisation of the Spanish Queen, Isabella, Grace Aguilar can also be seen as intervening in historical debates about this period. Isabella has gone down in history as a tyrant but Grace Aguilar wants to offer a different view with the potential for her as a woman to act with more humanity than her historical legacy had bequeathed to nineteenth century audiences hitherto. This is highly significant in the context of epistemological debates on gender and knowledge and an early example of how a woman's view of history can work to shift or challenge perspectives.

Grace Aguilar was to return to many of the debates and issues raised here within the context of *Home Influence* and *The Vale of Cedars* in later novels and short stories.¹¹⁶ It will only be when these have been fully exposed and reinserted within literary scholarship that the full contribution of this writer will be fully appreciated and evaluated. Significant to this study is the fact that this novelist and historian was able to utilise her own Jewish beliefs and knowledge to represent an alternative view of events both in the past and in her own present of the nineteenth century. She is also the one figure within this study that retained her religious faith until death and consistently was able to use this as an element for discussion within her

¹¹⁶ See for example her short story, 'The Edict', which appears in, Grace Aguilar, *Home Scenes and Heart Studies*, Groombridge and Sons, 1875 (12th edition), London, pp. 122-162. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain is again of central concern here.

writings. She has left behind her a body of work that in this early investigation lends credence to the view that,

There is no possibility of the acquisition or creation of stable, unchanging knowledge. Instead, there is a continuing spiralling. A structure of knowledge is subject to criticisms which generate principles, abstractions and new structures of knowledge, which, in their turn, give way before new criticisms to become new principles, abstractions and structures of knowledge in a never ending process.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Morwenna Griffiths, *Feminisms and the Self: The Web of Identity*, Routledge, London & New York, 1995, p.61.

Chapter Three

Harriet Martineau 1802-1876

Every autobiography assumes and reworks literary conventions for writing and reading. And its texture is ultimately determined by the ways in which meaning can be signified in a particular discursive context, an ideological boundary that always already confines the speaking subject.¹

Harriet Martineau has undergone a kind of resurrection in the late twentieth century by feminist scholars working in the Academy. From being placed as a relatively obscure figure, (whose writings had been out of print for most of the modern period and whose presence and contribution had been acknowledged in sparse footnotes and quotations in historical and literary texts),² the Virago Press in the 1980s republished both her two volume *Autobiography* and her novel, *Deerbrook*, as part of their series reclaiming the classical writings of women. This consequently led to further appraisals and writings on what many considered a strange Victorian character with rather eccentric manifestations in the way that she lived her life.³ Whilst it is useful to note this resurgence of late twentieth century commentaries the selection of Harriet Martineau for this thesis has been based, not solely on these, but upon her incontrovertible place as an important female intellectual of the nineteenth century.⁴ Harriet Martineau was a contributor to many of the main debates that effected nineteenth century society but her inclusion in this study has been determined by her importance in relation to her religious affiliation in her early life to Unitarianism. This factor in the secular age of the late twentieth century has been left relatively under investigated or commented upon.⁵ This is an

¹ Donna C. Stanton, *The Female Autograph*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, p.9.

² Gaby Weiner, 'Harriet Martineau: A Reassessment 1802-1876', in Dale Spender, *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions*, Women's Press, London, 1983, p.60.

³ Examples of some of the more thoughtful reappraisals that emerged on Harriet Martineau can be found in, for example, Linda H. Peterson, *Victorian Autobiography, The Tradition of Self-Interpretation*, Yale University Press, London, 1986, Mitzi Myers, 'Harriet Martineau's Autobiography: The Making of a Female Philosopher' in Estelle Jelenik, (ed.), *Women's Autobiography, Essays in Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980, Gaby Weiner, *Harriet Martineau: A Reassessment, 1802-1876*, in Dale Spender, *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions*, The Women's Press, London, 1983.

⁴ It is fair to mention here that this claim is endorsed within the marketing introduction written by Gaby Weiner in Virago edition of Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography*, Volume. 1, 1983, p.1. It reads, 'The achievements of this eminent Victorian radical were many: she was an early feminist, an international authority on the science of political economy, a fervent advocate of the abolition of slavery, a writer on numerous contemporary issues and a brilliant and prolific journalist'.

⁵ This is actually not the case with the biographies of Harriet Martineau published at the end of the nineteenth century or earlier in the twentieth century. For example, see Maria Weston Chapman, *The Memorials*, Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1877, Mrs. F. Fenwick Miller, *Harriet Martineau*, W.H.Allen & Co., London, 1884, 3rd edition, Mrs. Henry Fawcett, *Some Eminent Women of Our*

important missing link to the claims later made for Harriet Martineau because as Jane Rendall acknowledges, 'Unitarianism was to provide, perhaps because of its very distance from other congregations, an important route to feminism, and a source of egalitarian views about the relationships between the sexes'⁶. And, whilst Harriet Martineau is a problematic feminist figure for reasons which will be explored within this chapter, her presence in this project in respect of the connections between religious belief, writing and ideas of selfhood is extremely significant in the ways in which she exemplifies women's experience. She also contradicts or questions some of the assumed stereotypes that we have of the nineteenth century with regard to issues of female literary production and wider questions with regard to female identity and public position. Earlier, the comments invoked with regard to Harriet Martineau's strangeness are part of this investigation because that which is called strange is often that which is different and Harriet Martineau is certainly different from some of the dominant ideas and ideals about femininity during this period. This mark of difference was to actually become a feature of her life as well as her later inheritance and legacy to women's writing and to histories of feminism in Britain. In this chapter, Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography* and her early writings on religion will be used to forge further connections between issues of gender, selfhood and religion during the nineteenth century. There will also be reference made to her only novel, *Deerbrook*.⁷

Brief Biography

Harriet Martineau was born in Norwich, Norfolk, on June 12th, 1802. She was the third daughter of a family of eight children. Her father, Thomas Martineau, was a manufacturer of bombazine and her mother, Elizabeth, was the daughter of a sugar refiner from Newcastle on Tyne. We can therefore 'place' Harriet and her family within the context of the nineteenth century provincial manufacturing middle classes. In the introduction to her *Autobiography*,⁸ Harriet Martineau provides the following details of her family history,

On the occasion of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1688, a surgeon of the name of Martineau, and a family of the name of Pierre, crossed the Channel, and settled with other

Times, Macmillan & Co., London, 1889, Theodora Bosanquet, *Harriet Martineau, An Essay in Comprehension*, Frederick Etchells & Hugh MacDonald, London, 1927, Vera Wheatley, *The Life & Work of Harriet Martineau*, Secker & Warberg, London, 1957, R.K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960. This shift from recording the influence and importance of the context of religion and its absence in work published post 1960 is another area worthy of further investigation and analysis.

⁶ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, Macmillan, London, 1985, p.106.

⁷ This investigation can be seen as perhaps partial in that it does not fully excavate and utilise the full publications of Harriet Martineau. A further full-length study, which focuses on further connections between the life and the writings of this important figure, is yet to be completed.

⁸ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1 & Vol.2, Virago edition (London, 1983.), is the offset edition from Smith, Elder and Co, third edition, 1877 and are the volumes referred to throughout.

Huguenot refugees in England. My ancestor married a young lady of the Pierre family, and settled in Norwich, where his descendants afforded a succession of surgeons up to my own day. My eminent uncle, Mr. Philip Meadows Martineau, and my eldest brother, who died before the age of 30, were the last Norwich surgeons of the name. My grandfather who was of the honourable series, died at the age of 42, of a fever caught among his poor patients.⁹

Here the writer appears to be concerned to provide both a past history for her family of 'solid' middle class foundations but also to highlight the lives of her (note, male) family members and their lives spent, and sometimes ended, through and because of their service to others. The other important feature that is revealed from this short extract is the history of dissent within the Martineau family.

However, by the time of Harriet's birth, the family religion had been transformed and was that of Unitarianism. This was a religion still practising rigid codes of discipline but one that also embraced the central importance of education in the development of each individual. Harriet Martineau as a direct consequence of this family faith received an education far superior to that of most of her contemporaries.¹⁰ The Martineau family fortunes were shattered in the great economic crisis of 1825-6, when the bottom went out of the market in bombazine.¹¹ Thomas Martineau was already quite ill at this time and the pressures that accompanied his firm's collapse is detailed by Harriet Martineau in her *Autobiography* as a precipitating force in bringing about his death. By 1829, all the money from the family business had gone and in her father's will, Harriet had been left penniless. Poverty for Harriet though can be seen, with hindsight, as a blessing in disguise. Harriet comments, 'I rather enjoyed it at the time; for there was scope for action; whereas in the long dreary series of preceding trials, there was nothing possible but endurance'.¹² Family poverty meant a kind of freedom for the young woman because as she herself suggests, 'I who had been obliged to write before breakfast, or in some private way, had henceforth liberty to do my work in my own way, for we had lost our gentility!'¹³

No longer hampered by propriety,¹⁴ Harriet went to work 'with needle and pen.'¹⁵

⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1., Virago, London, 1983, p.7-8.

¹⁰ Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1979, p.133 notes that usually, 'middle-class girls had the choice of very small private boarding schools offering main accomplishments (French, music, drawing, deportment) or ill-paid and ill-trained home governesses. There was nothing equivalent to the boys' great public schools and Universities.'

¹¹ Bombazine was a material used mainly for mourning and funeral attire. Its appeal was challenged by cheaper imported materials coming into Britain from the 'new' colonies.

¹² Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1., p.145.

¹³ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1., p.142.

¹⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1., p.100. Here Harriet Martineau comments on the social values of the period when she is growing up, 'when I was young it was not thought proper for young ladies to study very conspicuously; and especially with pen in hand. Young ladies, (at least in provincial towns), were expected to sit down in the parlour to sew - during which reading aloud was permitted, or to practice their music but so as to be fit to receive callers without any signs of blue-

Through her deafness Harriet was precluded from one of the few occupations open to the newly poor, but educated middle class woman, of teaching. Similarly she was debarred from providing musical instruction. Both vocations were actually entered by her sisters, leaving Harriet to take stock of what was actually available to her. Initially she devised (what now seems an extremely 'modern' and ambitious idea for a single individual) a correspondence course for children but this was a failure through lack of response. In desperation she sold most of her clothes and then began to take in 'fancy' sewing work. Through this she was able to earn a living of fifty pounds a year. Her mother was convinced that Harriet should make this her priority over writing as sewing was a traditional and 'known', acceptable vocation for women in such circumstances as theirs. Harriet disagreed and with the encouragement of her brother James Martineau, she wrote to the editor of *The Monthly Repository*, the Unitarian journal, and gained employment, reviewing books by others for fifteen pounds a year. For Harriet herself these two occupations and incomes felt that 'it was truly life that I lived during those days of strong intellectual and moral effort.'¹⁶ It is highly significant that the first entry that she has into the public world as a writer was offered to her through the vehicle of the family faith. This is an aspect which was also shared by other women writers of this period in this study and a feature overlooked by many researchers hitherto.

The result of her studies and of her writing culminated in her moving to London with her mother. They also led ultimately to the publication her *Illustrations of Political Economy*. These were twenty monthly instalments, published between 1832 and 1834. Although she had initial difficulties in finding a publisher for these *Tales* they were to become extremely successful and profitable. 'The monthly sales hovered between ten thousand which Fox (her publisher) calculated to mean about 144,000 immediate readers.'¹⁷ This success meant that she 'became the fashion',¹⁸ and was courted by politicians, employers and trade unionists alike, who were all keen to get her to espouse their causes in fictionalised form for the general public.

In 1834 Harriet Martineau travelled to America and took up the cause for the abolition of slavery. She attained great notoriety and on her return to England published two accounts of her travels and experiences, *Miscellanies*, in 1836 and *Society in America*, 1837. Harriet Martineau was also at this time continually employed by various periodicals, including *The Monthly Repository*, to produce articles on a variety of topics. In 1839 she published her only full-length novel, *Deerbrook*, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. In the

stockingism which would have been reported abroad.'

¹⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p.145.

¹⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p.145.

¹⁷ R. K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960, p.113.

¹⁸ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1. p.185.

same year, Harriet Martineau also became very ill and this illness resulted in her taking to her sick bed for five years. This decision has been viewed by many as one element that makes up this woman's 'strangeness' as does her seemingly full recovery five years later but her medical case has since been researched and commented upon¹⁹. Harriet Martineau obviously did not endear herself to the medical professions of her own time when she claimed that her recovery was not through any aid from them but through the benefits of spiritualism. This coincided with her increasingly anti-theological position and her new friendship and writing partnership with one Henry Atkinson, an avowed atheist. Harriet Martineau's decline in public esteem and reputation can be largely traced to this association. So, whilst in her own age, her removal or withdrawal from a publicly avowed religious life causes her to become ignored, the absence of modern day commentaries upon her fail to fully acknowledge this and the centrality of religion in the moral codes of nineteenth century society. It also works to demonstrate how an individual's career as a writer was also profoundly affected by these wider issues of faith and that Harriet Martineau's whole reputation becomes questionable when she voices her unbelief. It may also have further implications for her own identification process, her concentrating on producing 'short works' after this and her very active participation in the community in which she was to live.

In 1845 Harriet Martineau left London and moved to Ambleside in the Lake District to a home called The Knoll which was built to her own design and under her supervision. She became totally involved in the life of the community, formed a local Building Society and lectured to the local Mechanics Institute as well as continuing to be a prolific writer. For example in one year, that of 1861, Harriet Martineau published one hundred and nine leading articles for *The Daily News*, forty five leading articles for *The Boston Anti-Slavery Standard*, fortnightly articles for the Dickens publication *Once a Week* as well as a series of biographical sketches entitled *Representative Men*.²⁰ This work rate continued until her death in 1876 along

¹⁹ Full documentation of Harriet Martineau's complaint is available in both *The Lancet* and in a medical Report published by T.M.Greenhow. The latter published as *Medical Report of The Case of Miss H-M-* (i.e. her full name omitted) and T.M. Greenhow is listed as a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and who held a post as Senior Surgeon to the Newcastle -Upon-Tyne Infirmary, and Eye Infirmary. The Report was published by Samuel Highley, 32 Fleet Street, London & E.Charney, Newcastle in 1845. It appears from reading these that she was suffering from a tumour -in the fallopian tubes, cervix or womb and ovaries and that the treatment included the application of leeches and iodine compounds which were used in particular to cleanse that bit of the tumour that protruded from and, at times blocked the vaginal entrance. She was also placed on a course of opium. The medical report records, 'with some surprise', her melancholy depressed state, her lack of energy and her inability to walk. These documents make fascinating reading, as does the postmortem report on Harriet Martineau which justifies her 'miraculous' recovery through the finding that the tumour or blockage shifted position and then remained dormant until her death some years later.

²⁰ This example of one years work for Harriet Martineau is taken from Mrs. Fenwick Miller, *Harriet Martineau*, W.H.Allen & Co., London, 1884, third edition, pp188-189.

with her frequent role of hostess to her friends and family and her travels to Egypt.

The Autobiography

Harriet Martineau wrote a two - volume autobiography in 1855 in a breathtaking speed of three months. In this she gives particular emphasis to the importance of family and religious influences upon her which will be commented upon further in this chapter. The volumes also portray episodes and events and commentaries on her own life as well as providing extraordinary vignettes of people she had met, written or worked for. Examples include the Royal Family, Charles Fox the publisher, Thomas Carlyle and his wife Jane Welsh. Harriet Martineau had worked with Carlyle and had helped to organise some of his lecture tours around Scotland and England. She also knew William Wordsworth who was one of her near neighbours in the Lake District and who appalled Harriet by his meanness of charging his guest for a cup of tea!. Details are also recorded of her relationships with John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, and Charlotte Bronte whom Harriet Martineau greatly admired but also admonished for the way in which 'the passions' were in the forefront of her works. She also wrote about the influence of Robert Browning and Charles Dickens who was Harriet Martineau's employer on the journal *Once a Week* of which he was both founder and editor. William Thackeray is also mentioned as are a number of politicians, both Tory and Whig. She also recorded meetings with Edwin Chadwick, the famous sanitary reformer of the nineteenth century and Thomas Malthus, now remembered for his *Essays on Population*. Testimonies were also provided of her more private relations with close friends, servants and members of her family who, of course, included one of the leading Unitarian ministers of the day in the figure of her brother, James Martineau.

If one adds to this checklist of networks of association, connection and influence Harriet Martineau's involvement in some of the key issues of the nineteenth century one begins to get an idea of the range of her activities and possible influence during her own lifetime. She comments in the *Autobiography* on issues of political reform and economics, slavery, religious crisis, spiritualism, the 'woman' question, education, work, morality and ethics. The *Autobiography* also provides an insight into the actual material existence of a single, independent, intellectual nineteenth century woman, who also wrote a novel. Whilst Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography* has been investigated and commented upon in the twentieth century there has been little attempt to fully recognise her sphere of influence by the collation and publication of the full extent of her writings. This is partly explained by the latter day resurgence in women's history and feminist research but this process would not have taken so

long perhaps for Harriet Martineau's male contemporaries, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens and Matthew Arnold for example.

The Writing of the Autobiography

In the introductory preface to the first volume of her life written at Ambleside in 1855 Harriet Martineau wrote that, 'From my youth upwards I have felt it was one of the duties of my life to write my autobiography'. The interesting word here within the context of her faith, Unitarianism, is the word 'duties'. Harriet Martineau felt the need to excavate her life for the benefit of others, to perhaps provide a model of living or to provide an education for others? Also, what emerges is the fact that she had had the idea in her mind long before she actually became a famous or public figure, so that in the execution of her life story she was concerned to provide a framework of herself as both 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary'. In this way Harriet Martineau privileged the *Autobiography* as a didactic form with the presentation of a life narrative which works for others to follow or, at least, to learn from. Harriet Martineau therefore placed herself in the role of the educator and the teacher, a figure that was also to emerge as a dominant and central force in her novel *Deerbrook*.

The *Autobiography* was also a work that Harriet Martineau started at least twice before its final breakneck speed final version. The first was in 1831, before the publication of the *Illustrations of Political Economy*. This publication was to bring her to the attention of the general public. At this time she was living in the provinces, earning her living by writing and needlework. The second attempt was recorded as being in 1841 and this was during the period of her long illness mentioned previously. Both attempts came to an abrupt halt as other projects overtook her but this final version, 1855, was motivated again by illness and as she records, 'a decree from two leading physicians that she had a mortal disease'. Convinced whilst writing that she could die at any time she therefore also made arrangements with a friend in America, Maria Weston Chapman to finish the work in the event of her death. Weston Chapman's additional volume to Harriet Martineau's own is an interesting and useful commentary on the earlier volumes. But, Harriet Martineau did not die before the book was completed, illustrated, printed and bound. She was to live on for another twenty-one years after its completion. This provides another contestable factor - what kind of autobiography finishes half - way through or at least two thirds of the way through an individual's life? What are the strengths and limitations of this especially as the completed text was not published until after her death in 1876? The author did not return to the manuscript to amend or reshape in the light of these later, busy and prolific years. These 'missing years' of her life and achievements have to be found in her other publications and letters and we are left to piece together those empty, silent but still very full moments.

Organisation of the Autobiography

The two - volume work is divided into six sections called 'Periods'. Each period is offered by the author as representing a picture of Harriet Martineau around very specific thematic points. For this reason one critic, Mitzi Meyers, has suggested that Harriet Martineau is a 'philosopher autobiographer'²¹ as she represents her life as both representative and unique. In doing this Meyers suggests that Harriet Martineau recognises, 'the typicality of her experience in an age of cultural transition but is also aware of its peculiarities, her infirmities, her gender and her family configuration'²². One could and should also add here the author's cognisance of the influence of the religion in which she was brought up especially as it was this which first presented her with the opportunities for publication. Additional to the philosopher writer one can also see the imprint of the romantic age upon Harriet Martineau as she describes her life using 'autobiographical poetry'. An illustration of this stylistic device is the way in which she describes her life in terms of the seasons, 'My life began with winter, burst into summer, and is now ending with autumn -mild and sunny. I have no spring; but that cannot be helped now'.²³ Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography* symbolises how Victorian autobiographers were writing the stories of their own lives at a particularly interesting moment in the history of human consciousness. A period when romanticism had done much to change the way man thought about and experienced himself, but Freud had not yet appeared on the scene with his radical redefinition of self, society and discourse.²⁴

Whilst this can be applied to Harriet Martineau it could also be further suggested that one particular influential source of inspiration from romanticism was William Wordsworth and especially his belief in the lasting importance of childhood impressions for adult identity. This concern with childhood was part of a broader tendency to re-emphasise the significance of the individual and to make possible the validity of individual judgement even when these clashed with conventional opinion.²⁵ In Wordsworth (who in later years was to become Harriet Martineau's near neighbour at Ambleside), Harriet Martineau found a language of autobiographical poetry and a way for using this as a device for moral instruction. In a letter to Sir George Beaumont Wordsworth comments that, 'Every great poet is a teacher: I wish

²¹ Mitzi Myers, 'Harriet Martineau's Autobiography: The Making of a Female Philosopher' in Estelle.C.Jelenik, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980., p.56.

²² Mitzi Myers, 'Harriet Martineau's Autobiography: The Making of a Female Philosopher' in Estelle. C. Jelenik, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980., p.57.

²³ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1., p.180.

²⁴ George.P.Landow, *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*, Ohio University Press, Ohio, 1979, p.xv.

²⁵ Boris Ford, *From Blake to Byron*, The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Penguin, London,

either to be considered as a teacher, or as nothing'.²⁶ He adds, 'There is scarcely one of my poems which does not aim to direct attention to some moral sentiment, or some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution'.²⁷ Both these statements could equally be attributed to Harriet Martineau as everything she wrote had a didactic or moral purpose - even the narrative of her own life.

Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography* is untypical of other Victorian autobiographies. For instance, if one compares this work with those of her male contemporaries, Charles Darwin or John Stuart Mill, the domestic scenes and relationships of her life have an equal prominence with the worlds of religion, politics and economics, and are not subsumed into the sub-text and left for conjecture. John Stuart Mill for example in his narrative, *My Autobiography*, makes no mention of his mother at all in the representation of his life. So this female life presents a picture of complete unity and balance - a combination of domesticity, intellectual pursuit and literary achievement. One can thus suggest that Harriet Martineau, unlike her male counterparts, had an awareness of the importance of family influences directly upon the creation or construction of her 'self' and the interaction between the family as a cultural institution and other agents, religion especially. But perhaps one could also suggest that this balanced picture of herself was also gender determined. By this one means the prescription and proprieties that the woman writer was expected to conform to in any representation. It was essential for a woman to write in a controlled, organised way but especially in a manner which saw all her priorities in her life grounded and framed within the domestic and private sphere where femininity and the ideology of 'true womanhood' was being located. She does, as Mitzi Meyers maintains, 'understand that concrete domestic circumstances shape our lives as ineluctably as abstract ideas. Her autobiography is very much a portrait of the woman as intellectual'.²⁸

Despite Harriet Martineau appearing to want to assert a balance or unity within her presentation of selfhood, it is interesting to note the tension offered in the text between the role of dutiful daughter - selfless, devoted to others - and that of the careerist, independent woman of letters living by her pen. This is endorsed further in a letter that Harriet Martineau wrote to her mother in 1833. Whilst she began the letter with the strong assertion that 'My Business in

1982, No.5., p.42.

²⁶ Boris Ford, *From Blake to Byron*, The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Penguin, London, 1982, No.5. p. 247.

²⁷ Boris Ford, *From Blake to Byron*, The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Penguin, London, 1982, No.5. p. 247.

²⁸ Mitzi Meyers, 'Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography*: The Making of a Female Philosopher' in Estelle. C.Jelinik, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980.p.58.

life has been to think and learn and to speak out with absolute freedom what I have thought and learned',²⁹ there is an implication that this famous woman writer was still feeling intimidated by her mother and at pains to appease her. The letter ends by saying, 'I fully expect that both you and I shall occasionally feel as if I did not discharge a daughter's duty, but we shall both remind ourselves that I am now as much a citizen of the world as any professional *son* of yours could be'.³⁰ The other women in this study also share this gender ambiguity with regard to the presentation of themselves. Mary Kingsley, who is discussed in chapter five, when describing her achievements always referred to herself as a *man*. One can begin to suggest that their lives can be read in a representative manner. The ways by which the effects of dominant ideology of the period on women with respect to propriety was felt. This, for Harriet Martineau, appears to have been there from her early childhood in which her difference is offered in a particularly painful light. Harriet Martineau traces her life from the early age of two (plotting the first thoughts that she can remember) to the time of writing but, as stated earlier, this is not presented in a consistent linear narrative form. The writing older self constantly interpolates and judges the earlier self throughout. Using this device, Harriet Martineau presents her life as an educational model of comprehension, acceptance and transformation. The reader is left in no doubt that we are to read her life as one of progression. Also, the reader reaction is determined as one of sympathy, empathy and enlightenment. The life recorded is organised optimistically, 'around her stage by stage pilgrimage from darkness to enlightenment'³¹. This representation seems to work to invert the normal use of the word pilgrimage in a strict religious sense. A pilgrimage is normally a journey towards a shrine or to celebrate religious feeling whereas with Harriet Martineau and other women in this study the journey to enlightenment is one where, on the way, religion becomes a rejected discourse. What is important here too though is Harriet Martineau's recognition that in any record of a life one is also creating a narrative whereby 'development implies causality'.³² Hence, the narrative strategy of revealing and critiquing Harriet Martineau adopts works to suggest the cause and effect model of her life from family influences, religion, (in particular, Unitarianism), necessarianism, mesmerism and finally what she called her anti-theological position as agnostic.

²⁹ Harriet Martineau in Karen Payne, *Between Ourselves: Letters Between Mothers and Daughters, 1750-1982*, Michael Joseph, London, 1983., p.88.

³⁰ Harriet Martineau in Karen Payne, *Between Ourselves: Letters between Mothers and Daughters, 1750-1982*, Michael Joseph, London, 1983.,p.88.

³¹ Mitzi Meyers, 'Harriet Martineau's Autobiography: The Making of a Female Philosopher' in Estelle.C. Jelenik, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980,p. 53.

³² Wayne Shumaker, *English Autobiography, Its Emergence, Materials and Form*, University of California, Berkeley, 1954, p.89.

Harriet Martineau's style of composition within the writing of her life exemplifies George P. Landow's contention that because Victorian autobiography can be regarded 'not as intimate speech but public discourse',³³ there is a notion of writing for an audience. And, because of the inclusion of all aspects of her life, Harriet Martineau is perhaps offering up an example of female independence to an assumed female readership. She is also concerned here to plot the value of her own family religion and the benefits of education that this gave to her. She is also gracious in placing emphasis on her brother James Martineau, himself a public figure, and the part he played in encouraging her to think for herself and to write³⁴. Without these factors the author appears to suggest that she would not have found her public voice. This balanced picture of herself and the recognition of the part played by others was also essential for any woman writer to have at this period. George P. Landow asserts, this very act of writing for public consumption, 'was in some manner to question the role society had assigned them and the really proper woman was not supposed to have an audience at all'.³⁵

Childhood and Religion in the *Autobiography*

For the older Harriet Martineau, reflecting on her early years in another work, childhood is offered as 'a period of painful and incessant longing for the future...a longing for strength of body and of mind, for independence of action, for an escape in short'³⁶ and this is reiterated within the *Autobiography* where she states that she 'never passed a day without crying'.³⁷ This pitiful image invokes some sympathy in the reader once we discover that one of the real or underlying causes of her unhappiness was the fact of her deafness. This disability was not acknowledged or noticed by neither parents nor teachers until she was fourteen years old. Harriet Martineau also records bouts of nightmares as a child and how 'nothing is more strange than this power of re-entering as it were the narrow mind of an infant, so as to compare it with that of maturity'.³⁸ The mature narrator does make comparison and ends by blaming her now dead parents for their inattention,

It seems to me now that a little closer observation would have shown them the causes of the bad health and fitful temper which gave them so much anxiety on my account; and I am sure that a little more of the cheerful tenderness which was in those days thought bad for children

³³ George P. Landow, *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*, Ohio University Press, Ohio, 1979, p.xxvii.

³⁴ This representation may also be seen as a desire to gloss over the way in which her movement away from Unitarianism and her 'dabbling' in mesmerism caused a rift between her and James for some years. It could also be interpreted as a formal apology through acknowledging his importance in her life pathway.

³⁵ George P. Landow, *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*, Ohio University Press, Ohio, 1979, p.xxvii.

³⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Life in the Sickroom*, third edition, 1844 rpt, Edward Moxon, London, 1849, pp. 168-169.

³⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1. p. 43.

³⁸ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1. p.14.

would have saved me from the worst faults and from a world of suffering.³⁹

Her episodes of being a sickly child are also familiar depictions of childhood from other writers from this period. Both John Stuart Mill and John Ruskin accused their parents, in some way, as responsible for fairly miserable beginnings to their lives. Mill said of his father James: 'the element which was chiefly deficient in his moral relation to his children was that of tenderness';⁴⁰ whilst John Ruskin in *Praeterita* blames his parents, more overtly, for everything, from his shyness in company to his inability to swim or ride a horse.⁴¹

Peter Coveney in *The Image of Childhood* has also forged a convincing argument to demonstrate the similarity between nineteenth century autobiographical representations of childhood and fictional ones. He suggests that these texts from the period have core similarities that centre round notions of childhood innocence and negative feelings of inadequacy, which lead to ultimate self-pity on reflection.⁴² So miserable childhoods and their concurrent episodes and manifestations appear to become common tropes within a range of nineteenth century texts. Barbara Charlesworth Gelphi is convinced that male autobiographers like Ruskin were influenced by the portrayals of children by Charles Dickens in his fictional works claiming that he (Dickens), 'by mediating the Romantic image of the child to the Victorians, marred it and sentimentalised it by his self-pity'.⁴³ She thus asserts that a common autobiographical childhood becomes one of the 'Dickensian waif'.⁴⁴ But, with regard to Harriet Martineau one can also see the persistence of both the Romantic representation of the child and her utilisation of religious ideologies where the child is both innocent and sinful.

Further research into this area might also throw light upon issues of gender, self presentation and common tropes for it may be that the childhood representations presented by women do have to take into account those issues of propriety and duty mentioned earlier. For instance, Harriet Martineau records how 'Currer Bell told me long after, that she had read with astonishment those parts of 'Household Education' which relate my own experience. It was like meeting her own fetch, - so precisely were the fears and miseries there described the same

³⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1. p. 11.

⁴⁰ John Stuart Mill, *My Autobiography*, Jack Stillinger, Ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, p.32.

⁴¹ John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, Vol.1, Orpington, Allen, London, 1899, see in particular pages 63-64, 157 & 329.

⁴² Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, Penguin Books, London, 1967.

⁴³ Barbara Charlesworth Gelphi, 'The Innocent 'I'' in Morton Bloomfield, (ed.), *The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory & Practice*, Harvard English Studies, Vol.1, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p. 59.

⁴⁴ Barbara Charlesworth Gelphi, 'The Innocent 'I'' in Morton Bloomfield, (ed.), *The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory & Practice*, Harvard English Studies, Vol. 1., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p.60.

as her own, told or not told in 'Jane Eyre'.⁴⁵ This feeling became mutual for when Harriet Martineau read Charlotte Brontë's fictional story of *Jane Eyre*, (subtitled, *an Autobiography*) she recorded that, 'when I read it, I was convinced that it was by some friend of my own, who had portions of my childish experience in his or her mind'⁴⁶. Both women it could be suggested had adopted a particular mode of writing, which was a new and dramatic form for women in the nineteenth century. Basic female experiences and emotions were being put in a way which was intimate and felt to be specific to female reality,⁴⁷ in this case one speaking of her lived experience recalled as an adult, the other using fiction. The hinterland between the two modes of representation often seems very narrow indeed. Harriet Martineau's representation of her life, like that of the tale of *Jane Eyre* and unlike that of Ruskin, was to be a progressive tale of success, resulting in a happy ending. So, Harriet Martineau's representation of her early years can be read remarkably as both unique and representative.

The unhappy young Harriet Martineau looked for solace within religion. She was particularly affected by the family religion of Unitarianism and its concern with the maintenance of principles. This had a profound effect upon her and can be claimed as a lasting influence upon her decision making and her writing, long after she had abandoned any form of visible religious worship. It did provide her with the necessary mental apparatus and environment from which to proceed and make judgements. The *Autobiography* records the family attendance at the Octagon Chapel in Norwich and how these made 'Sundays ...marked days, and pleasantly marked on the whole.'⁴⁸ But, this is not all, for the older narrator interpolates to comment further that, 'I must have been a remarkably religious child, for the only support and pleasure I can remember having from a very early age was from that source.'⁴⁹ She also writes that it was from her readings of the Bible and her attendance at Church that she made a resolution at the early age of seven to, 'become practically religious with all my strength'⁵⁰. It is upon this basis that her strong notion of justice also became established, an aspect which was to be a constant feature in many of her later writings.

The Unitarian faith was one particularly concerned with 'the maintenance of principles'⁵¹ and this can be seen as part of their inheritance within a context of exclusion and radical religious dissent. Questions of principle were to become a central feature of Harriet

⁴⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2. p. 324.

⁴⁶ Harriet Martineau in Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, The Women's Press, London, 1978, p.65.

⁴⁷ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, Virago Press, London, 1978. In particular see the arguments further outlined in Chapter: The Female Tradition, pp.3-37.

⁴⁸ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p.11.

⁴⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p.18.

⁵⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p.28.

⁵¹ R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heineman, London, 1960, p.68.

Martineau's early periodical writings found in *The Monthly Repository*.⁵² Some of these works are discussed later in this chapter in more detail. She records in her *Autobiography* how as a young child she was able to apply these principles and note the similarity between her home life and the decision - making processes of the Church service. She writes of how, within her home, her mother subjected the domestic servants to unfair treatment. She is also critical of the way in which she was used as a message taker or lawmaker, a role she resented. Harriet Martineau made a connection between these occurrences and the similar message coming from the Chapel where, 'duties preached were those of inferiors to superiors, while the per contra was not insisted upon with any equality of treatment at all. Parents were to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and to pay servants due wages; but not one word was ever preached about the justice due from the stronger to the weaker'.⁵³ These childhood ideas of duty, justice and equality form the foundation then of Harriet Martineau's intellectual career and sense of her self throughout her life and work and are the picture that she draws of herself within the *Autobiography*. This method of self - presentation works to privilege the analytical and critical mind at work from a very early, age.

These critical positions are further supported by her studies. Initially, the young Harriet Martineau included a detailed study of the Old and New Testaments. When she writes of this enterprise later in life, the older Martineau makes the conclusion that until the age of twenty, 'I Believed in God, milder and more beneficent and passionless than the God of the Orthodox, in as much as he would not doom any of his creatures to eternal torment'.⁵⁴ (It is interesting to note here the similarity between the independent study of Harriet Martineau as a young girl with that of George Eliot - see chapter four.) The main problem it seems for even the younger woman was with the actual character of God himself. She could not see how an all knowing, all seeing God would blame or absolve those whom he could have prevented from acting. Later, as a mature writer, this is more concretely offered as the sceptical view that, 'every Unitarian was at liberty to make Scriptures mean what suited his own views'.⁵⁵ This comment implicitly acknowledges her movement away from faith to agnosticism.

Mitzi Meyers claims that ultimately for Harriet Martineau we can say that, 'Thinking, philosophising was her salvation and necessarianism was the bedrock of her thought as both

⁵² Prior to the Act of Toleration 1813, the Unitarians had been excluded from power and prestige in public office. As a sect it then made a virtue of exclusion culminating in a strong tendency to political radicalism as R.K.Webb suggests in *Harriet Martineau: A Victorian Radical*, Heinemann, London, 1960,pps.65-95.

⁵³ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1. p.21.

⁵⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1, p.40.

⁵⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1, p.38.

Unitarian and agnostic'.⁵⁶ It is these two elements within the development of the young Harriet Martineau which remain constants in her depiction of her life. An important factor to take into account here is the level of formal education that she was to receive. Her education was a positive outcome and was directly influenced by the family's religion because, unlike some faiths, the Unitarian religion did believe in education for girls as well as boys. Harriet Martineau records how 'he (her father) and my mother exercised every kind of self denial to bring us up qualified to take care of ourselves. They pinched themselves in luxuries to provide their girls as well as their boys, with masters and schooling; and they brought us up to an industry like their own'.⁵⁷ At first, Harriet and her sister Rachel are taught at home sometimes by an employed master but more often by their brothers, Thomas who taught them Latin, Henry who instructed them in writing and arithmetic and their elder sister who gave them lessons in French and reading. In 1813 both Rachel and Harriet were sent to a day school run by a Norwich Unitarian preacher, Rev. Perry. The latter had recently been converted to the faith from Anglicanism and had lost his former position at Cherry Lane in the city. As a consequence of this he had also lost many of his boy pupils which was fortunate for Harriet and her sister, as to keep his school solvent he decided to open his doors to female students. School attendance for the young Harriet is recorded in the *Autobiography* as a thoroughly enjoyable experience. She states, 'We had no lessons that were not pleasant and that was the season of my entrance upon an intellectual life. In an intellectual life I found then, as I have found since, refuge from moral suffering and an always inexhaustible spring for moral strength and enjoyment'.⁵⁸ At the Norwich school she studied the Classics, French, Composition and the more practical tasks of domestic management. What is interesting here is how one can see the beginnings of a shift from religion as a solace to intellectual endeavour.

The joys of learning at school however did not work wholly to control the young woman's emotional outbursts at her parents. These were largely caused through her perception of her siblings being treated better than she and after one particularly bad outburst, when she was sixteen, her parents decided to send her to live with a relative in Bristol. This seems harsh treatment for a young daughter who was also deaf but the parents had been profoundly stretched in their tolerance at this session because the rebellious Harriet Martineau refused, for the first time in her life, to say her evening prayers. Whilst there are no further comments in the *Autobiography* from the mature Harriet Martineau on this episode, it might be possible to conjecture a link between her experience as a young girl here and the position she offers in a

⁵⁶ Mitzi Meyers, 'Harriet Martineau: The Making of a Female Philosopher' in Jelenik, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, p.63.

⁵⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1. p.27.

⁵⁸ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1. p.65.

later work, *Devotional Exercises*. This publication is discussed later in this chapter.

Harriet Martineau's early education and her move to Bristol can be seen to have had lasting benefits and influences upon the development of her intellectual assumptions and opinions with respect to selfhood and religious ideology. In Bristol we are told by the author that she lived in a domestic environment that 'thrived upon the acquisition and effective use of knowledge, and who would learn a new language in minutes; go through a tough philosophical book by taking turns in the court of air.'⁵⁹ This environment provided the impulse and motivation for the young Harriet Martineau who later records this period as one where, 'the chief intellectual improvement during this period was derived from private study.'⁶⁰ She embarked upon a demanding learning schedule studying Latin translation, learning Italian as well as reading a wide range of texts from history and literature.

It was also at Bristol that Harriet Martineau was to come under the influence of the Unitarian minister, Lant Carpenter. R.K.Webb places him as 'the chief inspirer of young Harriet's intellectual and religious career'.⁶¹ It was because of Lant Carpenter that Harriet Martineau's studies, for instance, turned to philosophy and in particular fell under the spell of the work of David Hartley and Joseph Priestley⁶². As a physician, Hartley had in his *Observations of Man*, published in 1749, been concerned with the physical basis of mental activity. Hartley maintained (similarly to John Locke) that 'if a series of sensations are impressed on the brain in the order ABCD, they arouse by some unknown means the ideas abcd; after repeated experience of this series, the sensation A, coming singly, will recall not only a but bcd as well.'⁶³ For Priestley, Hartley had 'thrown more useful light upon the Theory of the Mind than Newton did upon the Theory of the Natural World'⁶⁴ and it was Priestley's edition of Hartley that Harriet Martineau studied and she wrote,

he (Hartley) became my idol when I was mistress of my own course of study. That book I studied with a fervour and perseverance which made it perhaps the most important book in the world to me, except the Bible; and there really is in it, amidst its monstrous deficiencies and absurdities, so much that is philosophically true, as well as holy, elevating and charming, that its influence might very well spread into all events and experience of life, and chasten the habits

⁵⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p.93.

⁶⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1. p.93.

⁶¹ R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960, p.78.

⁶² R.V.Holt in *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England*, The Lindsay Press, Manchester, 1938 lists Joseph Priestley alongside Josiah Wedgwood, John Fielden M.P., and Dr. Southwood Smith as key figures of the Unitarian influence, p.16, having claimed in his introduction that 'Unitarians have been leaders in most of those causes which have transformed the England of the Eighteenth Century to the England of the Present Day', p.13. It should also be noted that in this listing there are no female contributors mentioned.

⁶³ Hartley quoted and explained in R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960,p.75.

⁶⁴ Priestley quoted in R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960,p.78.

and feelings, as it did in my case during that long series of years.⁶⁵

And, although this later judgement found flaws in Hartley's work, for the rest of her life Harriet Martineau's faith in education as a vehicle for social change was a direct result of Hartley's work in 'the presentiment of the concrete department of fact and action'.⁶⁶ One can also see how this was later harnessed to her religious faith and that these elements together became the main impetus for publishing works addressed to young people to offer them instruction.

The vital ingredient of Hartley's work was his 'doctrine of necessity' called necessarianism. This maintained that every event, material or mental had its causal antecedents and, 'how humans are products but not prisoners of circumstances, the doctrine of necessity offered to Harriet Martineau both an answer to her psychological and moral quandaries and a rationale for her future career as didactic educator'.⁶⁷ The realisation that people act as they do because of their previous training and environment and that the way to amend them, is not to pray for divine intervention but to improve their education, their surroundings and associations. This philosophy had a profound effect on Harriet Martineau and became a motivating force for her writing. As a necessarian every man (and woman?) is the master of his own destiny, and his own actions and determinations are necessary links in the chain of cause and effects. Thus 'necessarianism put a premium on enlightened self-discipline and enforced the moral labouring to bring about the millennium'.⁶⁸ Harriet Martineau was deeply influenced by this doctrine and coupled with her faith of Unitarianism that was ultimately concerned, as has been mentioned earlier, with 'the maintenance of principles',⁶⁹ she was even more convinced that her life must be an active one. Later she recorded,

My life had been (whatever else) a very busy one; and this conviction of the invariable action of fixed laws, has certainly been the main spring of my activity. When it is considered that according to Necessarian doctrine no action fails to produce effects, and no effort can be lost, there seems every reason for the conclusion which I have no doubt is the fact that Necessarians must be the most diligent and confident of workers⁷⁰

The doctrine of necessity enabled Harriet Martineau, through the use of her 'enlightened reason' to derive principles of action. Once derived these principles could be put into effect. Her conviction was one of optimistic perfectibility for she held the strong belief that 'not only

⁶⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p. 104.

⁶⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1. p.105.

⁶⁷ Mitzi Myers, 'Harriet Martineau's Autobiography: The Making of a Female Philosopher' in Jelinik, *Women's Autobiography*, p.63.

⁶⁸ R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960,p.90.

⁶⁹ R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960,p.68.

⁷⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol., 1., p.112.

that things could be done or should be done, but that they will be done'.⁷¹ This she again confirmed in the record of her life maintaining that,

from the time when I became convinced of the certainty of the action of laws, of the true importance of good influences and good habits, of the firmness, in short, of the ground I was treading, and of the security of the results which I should take the right means to attain, a new vigour pervaded my whole life, a new light spread through my mind, and I began to experience a steady growth in my self command, courage and consequent integrity and disinterestedness.⁷²

Thus, for her, the doctrine of necessity furnished a desire for explanation and consistency in all things. In the fusion of Unitarian philosophy with psychology, religion was gradually replaced by 'meaning' in an active sense. However, it is claimed here that the essential foundations laid by Unitarianism remained in place as structural signifiers with the belief that 'the freedom sought by the Unitarians was freedom not just to think but also to act'.⁷³

The return to the family home and early 'religious' publications

Harriet Martineau returned from living in Bristol to the family home in Norwich and she began to explore ways to use her education. Her brother James Martineau was instrumental in encouraging her to send off an article to the Unitarian journal, *The Monthly Repository*.⁷⁴ It is pertinent here to mention, of course, that James Martineau was to become one of 'the most influential of Unitarian religious leaders of the nineteenth century'. He is also perceived as 'not altogether typical in his attitude to political and social questions having as he did a combined belief in mind, conscience and soul of man as a seat of authority in religion whilst at the same time having a profound distrust of mind, conscience and souls of men in politics.'⁷⁵ He and his sister were ultimately to fall out when Harriet began to move away from the Unitarian faith but at this point, as she was beginning her career, he is recorded as being very supportive. This initial support is not unsurprising in the context of the Unitarian commitment to education that James would have shared with his sister. Whilst his energy went into the study of science and comparative religion in order to fulfil the prerequisites for the ministry, he encouraged his sister to take one of the few 'public' routes available to women at this time, of publication and in this case through journalism. The latter according to R.V. Holt was an attractive area to Unitarians because of their belief that the 'only sound basis of government was on the education of public

⁷¹ R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960, p.90.

⁷² Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1, p.110.

⁷³ R.V.Holt, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England*, The Lindsey Press, Manchester, 1938,p.16.

⁷⁴ A full account of *The Monthly Repository* can be found in H, McLachlan, *The Unitarian Movement in the Religious Life of England*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1934. Particular references to Harriet Martineau and her contemporary colleagues such as, John Stuart Mill, Robert Browning and Harriet Taylor, who were employed on the journal, appear on pps.182-190.

⁷⁵ R.V.Holt, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England*, The Lindsey Press, Manchester, 1938,p.142.

opinion.’⁷⁶ He notes the presence of Unitarians as editors and writers as well as owners of such publications as *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Morning Chronicle*.⁷⁷

The first contribution that Harriet Martineau made to *The Monthly Repository* was an essay entitled, ‘Female Writers on Practical Divinity’ and it was published in October 1822. The attribution of this to her is an interesting area of debate. Whilst in the *Autobiography*, Harriet Martineau states that she signed her earlier articles and journalistic pieces with the signature ‘V’ from Norwich, the biographer, Mrs. Fenwick Miller presents in her study of Harriet Martineau, evidence that the author’s early signature was actually one of Discipulus.⁷⁸ Mrs. Fenwick Miller also points out that Discipulus is the masculine form of the Latin for learner or apprentice. She further suggests that by using this device Harriet Martineau can be placed in the network of eminent women writers of the nineteenth century, who thought it necessary to assume a male identity to obtain a fair hearing and impartial judgement for their earliest work. She states, ‘Surely, as our Discipulus takes her place in this list with George Eliot, George Sand, and Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, a great deal is disclosed to us about how women in the past have had to make their way to recognition against the tide of public opinion’.⁷⁹ There is additional evidence to suggest that the taking of a masculine name was also used to disassociate themselves from ‘silly women novelists’.⁸⁰

Harriet Martineau provided in ‘Female Writers on Practical Divinity’, through her construction of the women who are her subject matter, an insight into her own position regarding the placing of female intellectuals. She begins by writing,

I do not know whether it has been remarked by others as well as myself, that some of the finest and most useful English works on the subject of Practical Divinity are by female authors. I suppose it is owing to the peculiar susceptibility of the female mind, and its consequent warmth of feeling, that its productions, when they are really valuable, find a more ready way to the heart than those of the other sex; and it gives me great pleasure to see women gifted with superior talents applying those talents to promote the cause of religion and virtue.⁸¹

Remembering that here Harriet Martineau was writing as a man, she appears, however subconsciously, to be arguing for the acceptability of works by women writers on the serious subjects of theology and morality. The essay ends,

⁷⁶ R.V.Holt, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England*, The Lindsey Press, Manchester, 1938,p.20.

⁷⁷ R.V.Holt, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England*, The Linsey Press, Manchester, 1938,p.20.

⁷⁸ Mrs. Fenwick Miller, *Harriet Martineau*, W.H.Allen & Co., London, 1884, third edition, p.39.

⁷⁹ Mrs. Fenwick Miller, *Harriet Martineau*, W.H.Allen & Co., London, 1884, third edition, p.39.

⁸⁰ This position is encapsulated by George Eliot who also features in this study in her essay, ‘Silly Novels by Lady Novelists’ which appears in, *A George Eliot Miscellany*, F.B.Pinion, (ed.), Macmillan & Co., London, 1982,p.14.

⁸¹ Harriet Martineau’s essay ‘Female Writers on Practical Divinity’ quoted in Mrs. Fenwick Miller,

I cannot better conclude than with the hope that these examples of what may be done may excite a noble emulation in their own sex and in ours such a conviction of the value of the female mind, as shall overcome our long cherished prejudices, and induce us to give our earnest endeavours to the promotion of women's best interests.⁸²

There are a number of points to follow up here. The obvious one was how this 'new' writer is concerned to set up a context that will be generous to future contributions from women, 'herself' included. But more than this, is the way in which Harriet Martineau appears to have taken on the role of the advocate for female creativity in her deployment of the masquerade of the male judge. There is an interesting duplicity at work here but there are further problems which emerge in the essay as Discipulus, alias Harriet Martineau, also appears to make a claim that there are innate differences in male and female developmental and intellectual processes. The basis of her argument is that the female mind is different from that of the male. Whether this position is further compounded by the fact of her disguise as a male writer and the necessary concomitants to hold or, at the very least, to display current male attitudes is difficult to say. But this is exactly the position that the mature Harriet Martineau was to spend her later years challenging, both in her writing and the way in which she lived her life.

This theme of women's acceptability and the way to bring about changes in social attitudes towards women is a re-occurring topic in Harriet Martineau's work⁸³ and the full extent of this cannot be fully included in this partial study. It is sufficient here to point out how this had relevance and significance for her own placing of herself in her *Autobiography* as a female writer and her subsequent involvement in the pursuit of equal rights for women.⁸⁴ Her *Autobiography* states her views and opinions.

It seemed to me, from the earliest time when I could think on the subject of Women's Rights and conditions, that the first requisite to advancement is the self-reliance which results from self-discipline. Women who would improve the condition and chances of their sex must, I am certain, be not only affectionate and devoted, but rational and dispassionate, with the devotedness of benevolence, and not merely personal love.⁸⁵

Harriet Martineau, W.H.Allen & Co., London, 1884, third edition, p.40.

⁸² Harriet Martineau's essay, 'Female Writers on Practical Divinity' quoted in Mrs. Fenwick Miller, *Harriet Martineau*, W.H.Allen & Co., London, 1884, third edition, p.42.

⁸³ See for example the often quoted article, 'Female Industry', *Edinburgh Review*, Vol.109, 1859 plus her books, *How to Observe: Morals and Manners*, London, 1838, *Guides to Service*, London, 1838, *Household Education*, London, 1849 and her novel, *Deerbrook*, London, 1839. The latter will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁸⁴ For example, her work with Josephine Butler in the Campaign to Repeal the Contagious Diseases Act and her publicity for the work of the nursing profession in conjunction with Florence Nightingale which are discussed in Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1979 and Karen Payne, *Between Ourselves*, Michael Joseph, London, 1983.

⁸⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1. Virago edition, offset from Smith, Elder & Co, third edition, 1877, London, 1983, p.400

She continues by saying that, 'the best friends of that cause are women who are morally as well as intellectually competent to the most serious business of life, and who must be clearly seen to speak from conviction of the truth and not from personal unhappiness'.⁸⁶ And even though the mature Harriet Martineau who had a successful career behind her had composed this, it is still the voice of the Unitarian with a commitment to fight for the cause of others. Jane Rendall notes that the actual research into women who were active at this time as feminist campaigners is still waiting to be collated but does assert, nevertheless, the key role played by women who had a background of religious dissent. She names Harriet Martineau as an important figure alongside Harriet Taylor Mill and Mary Carpenter.⁸⁷ But Rendall also positions Harriet Martineau as someone who had taken an individual route to distinction.⁸⁸ This is significant to this study which suggests that Unitarianism for Harriet Martineau was the distinguishing factor in the formation of her own sense of herself as a unique and different individual with a particular pathway to take in life. This was the path of the intellectual, and one with a particular role to play for others, as teacher and support. As she herself states her 'most serious business of life' had been a mission to provide information and understanding to others. Her aim was to act as an instrument of ideas, 'to help the powerless who dared not speak'⁸⁹ to free themselves by showing them how the forces of society acted upon them and then to demonstrate or suggest how to gain control over their own lives.

The next project that Harriet Martineau was to undertake culminated in the publication, *Devotional Exercises*, which has already been briefly referred to in this chapter. This book consists of and has as its subtitle: 'Reflections and Prayers for the use of young persons; to which is added a treatise on the Lord's Supper'. It was published in London in 1823 by Rowland Hunter, St Paul's Church Yard, but sold in Norwich by S. Wilkin. Being signed, 'A Lady', it has since been attributed to Harriet Martineau and is held in the British Library.⁹⁰ This instruction guide for young people can be read, with hindsight, as another ironic production from the rebellious young Harriet when read in the context of the later depiction of her own early years in the *Autobiography*. Ironic in the sense that the advice she was offering to others was obviously not perceived by her own parents as the pathway that

⁸⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1. Virago edition, offset from Smith, Elder & Co, third edition, 1877, London, 1983, p.402.

⁸⁷ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, Macmillan, London, 1985, pp.312-315.

⁸⁸ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, Macmillan, London, 1985, p.315.

⁸⁹ Mitzi Meyers, 'Harriet Martineau's Autobiography: The Making of a Female Philosophy' in Estelle.C. Jelenik, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1980, p.67.

⁹⁰ The Inscription in the copy of *Devotional Exercises* held at the British Library reads, 'Said to be

their daughter had strictly adhered to and had resulted in her banishment to Bristol.

This book written by Harriet Martineau was dedicated to Reverend Charles Wellbeloved. It also had an inscription that says ‘These Devotional Exercises are, with Great Respect Inscribed by a Humble Fellow Labourer in the Cause of Religion’. Harriet claims this homage is being paid because of the effects of reading Wellbeloved’s *Devotional Exercises* as a young girl. She goes on to write that her volume is needed now because the promise of further editions from Wellbeloved had not been forthcoming. She writes, ‘Being yet young I have a vivid remembrance of the ideas and feelings on devotional subjects, which in my early youth, I found to be the most impressive, and to excite the most powerful emotions, and which are by no means the same ideas and feelings which produce these effects at a more advanced age.’⁹¹ It is useful here to replicate the Subjects of the Reflections outlined within the text for a week’s devotion:

Sunday Morning	On the Duties of the Christian Sabbath
Sunday Evening	On Habitual Devotion
Monday Morning	On Benevolence
Monday Evening	On the Character of the Apostles Peter, John & Paul
Tuesday Morning	On the Government of the Temper
Tuesday Evening	Death
Wednesday Morning	On Humility
Wednesday Evening	On Self - Government
Thursday Morning	On the Goodness of God
Thursday Evening	On Charitable Judgements on Others
Friday Morning	Love and Reverential Obedience due to Jesus Christ
Saturday Morning	On the Uncertainty of Worldly Enjoyments
Saturday Evening	On the Value of Time

The author claims that these exercises are ‘written whilst young for the young’ and as such designed to promote empathy and shared context with her readership. The didactic element of this project is also obvious with the Duties on the Sabbath for example being prefaced with these comments,

A part of my time should also be devoted, if possible, to imparting to others, who have not enjoyed the same advantages as myself, that knowledge which may make them “wise unto salvation” for surely no leisure can be more usefully spent, than in revealing to the poor and the ignorant, the light of heavenly truth, and in making them hail the return of the Sabbath with the same pleasure which I experience.⁹²

the first publication of Harriet Martineau.’

⁹¹ Harriet Martineau, *Devotional Exercises*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1823, p.ii.

⁹² Harriet Martineau, *Devotional Exercises*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1823, p.3.

Further in this section one is also aware of the young Harriet Martineau's central belief in religion. She writes, 'I commit my life, and all that I have into thy hand, knowing that thou wilt do what is best for me, and only beseeching thee that thou wilt render me in some measure deserving of thy goodness.'⁹³ This submission to her Maker is one that she wishes to encourage others to commit to, and is a marked contrast to the mature Harriet Martineau's scepticism about God's ability to protect and nurture. Religious devotion was also for this young author a place of safety and security from the world for she notes that, 'Great as are the delights of devotion in times of prosperity, in affliction their value will be infinitely increased. From the portion of sorrow which has been my lot, I am aware of the insufficiency of worldly comfort. The consolations of religion alone are able to relieve the wounded heart.'⁹⁴ Faith, then, at this moment in Harriet Martineau's life was still the main support and comfort and a place where her identity appeared unproblematic as a believer. Her faith also provided her with an outlet for this, one of her first publications.

A further publication is to utilise this position for in 1826 Harriet Martineau published a volume called *Addresses; with Prayers and Original Hymns*. This is sub-titled: 'For the Use of Families and Schools' and again the volume appears as published by 'a Lady' but also with a further qualifier that this 'Lady' was also the authoress of *Devotional Exercises*.⁹⁵ In this book each section has an Address which is then followed by a prayer and a hymn that relates to the topic of the Address. The areas covered include 'the Duty of Prayer', on 'the Virtues which should Distinguish Childhood' as well as those which emphasise 'Perfect Knowledge will Produce Perfect Obedience' and that 'Patience in Suffering is Necessary to Salvation'. The author's preface states that the volume is 'primarily intended to be used in schools, or in large families of children, on occasions when circumstances prevent attendance at public worship'. It was also concerned to outline the premise and the construction of the volume that had been written to be deliberately accessible to children. The author writes that, 'There are few thoughts on religious subjects, probably none in this little volume, which are too high for common understandings if the language in which they are expressed be but plain enough'⁹⁶ She states further, that whilst the hymns written and included in this volume are to be regarded as the 'least important part', they have been a 'deliberate addition' because the 'children's ear,

⁹³ Harriet Martineau, *Devotional Exercises*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1823, p.3.

⁹⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Devotional Exercises*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1823, p.11.

⁹⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Addresses; With Prayers and Original Hymns; For the Use of Families and Schools*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1826.

⁹⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Addresses: With Prayers and Original Hymns; For the Use of Families and Schools*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1826, Preface.

delights in the music of poetry'.⁹⁷ This early writing from Harriet Martineau works to endorse the later mature writer's position with regard to childhood as a key moment.

In this early work it can also be seen how Harriet Martineau was beginning to frame ideas about herself and the wider role that she gave to religion. In Address II of Addresses, she provides a quotation from Hebrews VI, 12, 'That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises',⁹⁸ which works further to construct Harriet Martineau herself as a patient but hard working individual who is still a believer. Another Address, on 'True Freedom' also outlines that 'The choice lies between God and Mammon - between religion and the world. Religion is a mild and gentle ruler; the world is a tyrant: religion is a faithful guide; the world is a cruel deceiver: religion confers enjoyments, the world imposes tasks...'.⁹⁹ This works to construct the inner world as being that which provides solace and security and is a far cry from the later agnostic position taken of the worldly Harriet Martineau who was courted as a literary lioness.¹⁰⁰

It is this justification that she claims for her involvement in the production of the *Illustrations of Political Economy* which were concerned to present topics of political economy in a series of fictional tales. This project she claims, 'was the strongest act of will that I ever committed myself to; and my will was always a pretty strong one. I could never have even started my project but for my thorough, well considered steady conviction that the work was wanted, was even craved by the popular mind'.¹⁰¹ It was not enough for this Unitarian necessarian to think and analyse the ills of society, she had to take action on behalf of others for she claims, 'I thought of the multitudes who needed it and especially the poor, to assist them in managing their own welfare'.¹⁰² And whilst a twentieth century mind can be sceptical of this altruistic approach, as indeed were some of Harriet Martineau's own contemporaries, who believed she was fuelled by conceit, others were more concerned about her methods of delivery. John Stuart Mill for instance, believed 'that political economy could not be conveyed in fiction, and that the public would not receive it in any but the didactic form'.¹⁰³ Whatever judgements are made, the outcome of these publications was great success, both financially in making Harriet Martineau secure but also in putting her name to the forefront of most of the

⁹⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Addresses: With Prayers and Original Hymns; For the Use of Families and Schools*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1826, Preface.

⁹⁸ Harriet Martineau, *Addresses: With Prayers and Original Hymns; For the Use of Families and Schools*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1826, p.123.

⁹⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Addresses: With Prayers and Original Hymns; For the Use of Families and Schools*, Rowland Hunter, London, 1826, p.103.

¹⁰⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1. pp.271-296. In these pages Harriet Martineau expounds her definition of this term and its application to her career.

¹⁰¹ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p.160

¹⁰² Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p.171.

important debates of her age. After the publication of these she became established as a 'serious' writer and was approached from a variety of people, politicians, trade unionists, manufacturers, to use her skills to assert their cases.

The challenge of science to religion and the decline in Harriet Martineau's reputation

It would be a fitting testimony to a woman of Harriet Martineau's intellectual substance to be able to finish this chapter on her moment of triumph but it is also necessary briefly to record how certain factors brought about a change to her reputation. Through her involvement in mesmerism and her withdrawal from religious life Harriet Martineau's achievements were to become undermined. The beginnings of these changes can be traced back to a period of ill health during the years 1839-44. During her illness she had much time to think and evaluate her intellectual position under the shadow not only of her own illness but also the many deaths of friends and people around her. She moved away from the idea of God and Christian revelation to believe that, 'the conception itself of moral government, of moral qualities, of the necessity of a preponderance of happiness over misery must be essentially false *beyond* the sphere of human action because it relates merely to human faculties'.¹⁰⁴ She became convinced that, 'the best state of mind was to be found, however it might be accounted for, in those who are called philosophical atheists.'¹⁰⁵ She came to this conclusion through an evaluation that such individuals are usually 'conscientious, sincere, had great integrity, seriousness and great religious spirit'.¹⁰⁶ The choice of words here work to suggest that Harriet Martineau is not so much moving away from religion but working to place it and herself within a particular intellectual configuration. This configuration or 'image' she thinks would befit her well, for this is her longer rationale,

The philosophical atheists were the most humble-minded in the presence of the mysteries of the universe, the most equable in spirit and temper amidst the affairs of life, the most devout in their contemplation of the unknown, and the most disinterested in their management of themselves, and their expectations from the human lot: showing, in short, the moral advantages of knowledge (however limited) and freedom (however isolated and mournful) over superstition as shared by the multitude.¹⁰⁷

This conclusion reads now as slightly disingenuous for it is placed within a highly constructed version of the self she has offered in the two volume *Autobiography*. She may in fact have moved away from the Unitarian tenets of her youth but these are still writ large in this apologia for the religious spirit manifested as the figure of the 'honest doubter'. A critical stance to be

¹⁰³ Related by Harriet Martineau in *Autobiography*, Vol.2.p.1.

¹⁰⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.2.p.186.

¹⁰⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.2.p.189.

¹⁰⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.2.p.189.

¹⁰⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.2. p.189.

taken by many of her contemporaries. The words also work to evoke and remind the reader of the sad, isolated girl, who found solace in religion once and yet, now, seeks solace, not in a religion but in a discourse which is positioned by her as anti-theological. This position alone would not have led to the process of exclusion from respectability that Harriet Martineau was finally to suffer. Her path was set further to explore the connections between the anti-theological in the extreme through her experiments with mesmerism and her subsequent involvement with Henry Atkinson and in her co-authorship with him of *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*.

Harriet Martineau's belief in mesmerism as the cause of her cure from illness has been briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and she, herself, accords it further exposition in her *Autobiography*. Theodora Bosanquet in *Harriet Martineau: An Essay in Comprehension*, states that 'mesmerism was a branch of experimental science: it was the object of the phreno-mesmerists to show that the stimulation of the various organs of the brain provoked appropriate responses'.¹⁰⁸ R.K.Webb sees Harriet Martineau's involvement in this area as being in line with her sense of herself as a radical, free thinker for he claims for them that,

They rejected the separate existence of the mind (as Priestley had taught Harriet to do). They were materialists but also necessarians. In that belief they called for a national movement for reform and regeneration, to assert the moral and intellectual supremacy of man. Their philosophy offered a new view of criminology and saw in national education the instrumentality to the remodelling of society.¹⁰⁹

So for them and for Harriet Martineau, mesmerism as a philosophy stood on principles and truth and as such was positioned as anti-government, and anti-institutions. R.K.Webb suggests that for Harriet mesmerism encapsulated, 'all the elements within her present intellectual perception, anti-clericalism, scientific method, materialism, necessarianism, radicalism, education, humanity and martyrdom and was for her the penultimate step to positivism.'¹¹⁰ In the *Autobiography* Harriet Martineau recorded how her personal belief in scientific fact led her to view mesmerism as an 'agency by which human transactions will be extensively modified in the future as outward modes of living will be by such discoveries as Faraday's.'¹¹¹ She also noted how this had made others very cool towards her and how many in fact, 'regarded my experiment and recovery as an unpardonable offence; and by them I was

¹⁰⁸ Theodora Bosanquet, *Harriet Martineau: An Essay in Comprehension*, Frederick Etchells & Hugh MacDonald, London, 1927,p.162.

¹⁰⁹ R.K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960,p.253.

¹¹⁰ R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960,p.254.

¹¹¹ Harriet Martineau in R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960,p.251.

never pardoned.’¹¹² There is, however, a strong sense on reading this section of the reaction that she had anticipated of others to her new pursuits and interests. Harriet Martineau actually derived some degree of pleasure from this persecution because it once again placed her defending principles as well as confirming her sense of herself as different from others. It also seems a familiar role for this woman who throughout her life had, at times, inhabited the role of the martyr or the outsider.

It was when Harriet Martineau moved to the Lake District in 1845 that she had her first meeting with Henry Atkinson, whose friendship was to be seen by some as instrumental in her final move towards atheism and positivism. She was concerned to contradict this view and claimed that, ‘my passage from theology to a more effectual philosophy was, in its early stages, independent of Mr. Atkinson,’¹¹³ but does qualify this further by suggesting that his influence acted as a consolidating force. ‘Atkinson’s doctrine was in full agreement with the action of my mind for some past years.’¹¹⁴ It might also be significant that just after her meeting with Atkinson, Harriet Martineau travelled to the East and spent ten weeks travelling on the Nile.¹¹⁵ This demonstrates not only the full recovery of her health but also the value of an experience within another culture which was to make her rethink some of her views on religion and human development. She writes, ‘in a way which it could never have been if I had not wandered amidst the old monuments and scenes of the various faiths, that a passage through these latter faiths is as natural to men and was necessary in those former periods of human progress...’.¹¹⁶ This later reflection from her experience of travel also connects with the early writings and studies of the younger Harriet Martineau on different faiths which were published by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in London earlier in her career.¹¹⁷

When Henry Atkinson and Harriet Martineau published *Letters on the Laws of Man’s Nature and Development* both were treated with a certain degree of contempt. Henry Atkinson was regarded as a figure on the fringes of nineteenth century scientific thought and did not have the public credibility or the necessary following to carry off such a controversial publication. One critic writes,

This was not a work of genuine and lasting importance. Scientists for the most part put it contemptuously aside as a piece of quackery, but it raised a storm which was fierce, though

¹¹² Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.2. p.194.

¹¹³ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2.p.281

¹¹⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2. p.219.

¹¹⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, p.278.

¹¹⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.2. p.280.

¹¹⁷ There were three essays that Harriet Martineau had submitted to a competition and won. The essays were, ‘The Essential Faith of the Universal Church; deduced from the Sacred Records’, 1931; ‘The Faith Unfolded by many Prophets; an essay...addressed to the disciples of Mohammed’, 1932 and ‘Providence as manifested through Israel...addressed to the Jews,’ 1832. All the women in this study share this early interest and research in other religions.

brief, and it helped to make those people who loved and revered the truths of their religion look with an added suspicion and bitterness on any who, in the name of science, laid hands on sacred things.¹¹⁸

The main area of contention was the critique being made in the book of religion through using the ideas 'now familiar under the name Evolution'¹¹⁹ and human development. Harriet Martineau claimed that 'the only method of arriving at a true philosophy of mind is by the contemplation of Man as a whole - as a creature endowed with definite properties, capable of being observed and classified like other phenomena resulting from any other portion of Nature.'¹²⁰ It was from here a logical progression for Harriet Martineau to become involved in a translation and condensation of the work of Auguste Comte's *Positive Philosophy*. In this work Comte gave an account of the necessary intellectual development of mankind and expounded his 'law of Three Stages', according to which mankind must pass through the stages of religion, metaphysics and science.¹²¹ Comte believed that the chief objective of his day was to prepare men's minds for 'the inevitable onset of the scientific and positive age.'¹²² Harriet Martineau completed the translation in less than six months. She recorded her pleasure in the task in her *Autobiography* and hoped that, 'the appearance of a readable English version would put a stop to the mischievous, though ludicrous, mistakes about Comte's doctrine and work put forth by men who assumed and might be expected to know better.'¹²³ Harriet Martineau believed and reinforced her beliefs in this translation that Comte's work was 'written largely on the social turmoil which this generation is in, and generations to come will be in, from the collusion between the theological passion of one social period and the metaphysical rage of another, with the advance of the positive philosophy which is to supercede both'.¹²⁴ This statement demonstrates that Harriet Martineau was very much in the forefront of a sea change of intellectual thought and debate during the nineteenth century. She was not the only person working on and influenced by the work of Auguste Comte, for the critic, writer and partner of George Eliot, George Henry Lewes was also working on bringing Comte's work to the attention of an English audience.

Harriet Martineau's intellectual journey was complete and positivism supplied her with a worldview and a revolutionary optimism for the future. At the end of her *Autobiography* she maintained, 'that the real and justifiable and honourable subject of interest to human beings,

¹¹⁸ Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Books*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1935, p.91.

¹¹⁹ John Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, Vol. 3, Macmillan & Co, London, 1886, p.197.

¹²⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2. p.370.

¹²¹ Robert Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers*, Paladin, London, 1976, p.244.

¹²² Robert Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers*, Paladin, London, 1976, p.245.

¹²³ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2. p.393.

¹²⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2. p.293.

living and dying, is the welfare of their fellows surrounding them, or surviving them' and the strong conviction that,

When scientific facts are established and self-evident truths are brought out of them, there is an end of conflict; or it passes on to administer discipline to adventures in fresh fields of knowledge. About this matter, of the extinction of theology, by a true science of human nature, I cannot but say that my expectation amounts to absolute assurance; and that I believe that the worst conflict is over. I am confident that a bright day is coming for future generations ¹²⁵

Whilst these words were written in 1855 the *Autobiography* was not to be published until 1877 and it is in the reviews of the work that one can observe that the production of this representation of her life had actually achieved the opposite of Harriet Martineau's intention. For rather than the record of her life arousing more interest in her achievements, publications and contributions to intellectual debates in her own age, the *Autobiography* itself became the focus of attention and the interest in her presentation of herself and others overwhelmed interest in her other works. This has left a legacy of unresolved connections within the intellectual lives and developments of female writers of this period and is mirrored in the other women's lives within this study. They were women who were working across a range of genres, and who were concerned to explore ideas and movements in respect to religion, gender and identity. In the case of Harriet Martineau, many of these issues and pre-occupations can be seen as the focus of attention within her novel.

***Deerbrook*, 1839**

Deerbrook was published in 1839 in three volumes and has been described as, 'a domestic novel - a story of love and marriage in a provincial community'.¹²⁶ It centres upon the Ibbotson sisters - Hester and Margaret - who, after the death of their father, go to stay with the Grey family, in the country, for the summer period in order that their financial affairs in Birmingham can be sorted out. These sisters are the object of great curiosity, and, in time, Hester's name is linked with that of Edward Hope, the village doctor, and Margaret is courted by Philip Enderby, a lawyer and brother of the Rowland family. These two love stories provide the framework of the text. However, on close reading of *Deerbrook*, it can be claimed that the novel is also the antithesis of this. Roland Barthes notes that in a 'pleasurable text', 'the more a story is told in a proper well-spoken straightforward way, in an even tone, the easier it is to reverse it, to blacken it, to read it, inside out. This reversal, being a pure production, wonderfully develops the pleasure of the text.'¹²⁷ Hence, part of the joy in reading *Deerbrook*, within the context of Harriet Martineau's developing ideas, is this process of reading - both as

¹²⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2. p.460.

¹²⁶ Eva Figs, *Sex and Subterfuge*, Macmillan, London, 1982,p. 114.

¹²⁷ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1975,p.26.

a love story and as an anti-love story. In this respect *Deerbrook* stands as 'a novel of domestic realism born in reaction to romanticism.'¹²⁸ The hero of the novel is Edward Hope and this character is one of the first doctor heroes to appear in the novel form.¹²⁹ The Tillotsons, in their book, *Mid-Victorian Studies* claim that *Deerbrook* was the first novel of its type, the foundation stone for the social domestic realist text, as it was to develop later in the nineteenth century. It was different from the 'silver-fork' tradition and from, at the other end of the literary market, the Newgate novels. This difference was the shift of attention in class terms with the presentation of characters in a 'middle-life' setting, i.e. a presentation of the 'new' professional middle classes.¹³⁰

The early nineteenth century was one of rapid change and transition with increasing urbanisation and industrialisation which gave rise to changes in attitudes and a questioning of beliefs that Harriet Martineau both exemplifies and works through during the narrative of *Deerbrook*. The title of the novel is the name of the village. Most of the action of the novel takes place in the village and Deerbrook is introduced as 'a rather pretty village, dignified as it was with the woods of a fine park, which formed the background to its best points of view'.¹³¹ It is also a site where an imagined 'town dweller' is positioned at the onset as beguiled by such a place. The rural idyll of peace, beauty, harmony and tranquillity is thus established and the narrative unfolds to explore many themes common with later Victorian works of fiction. These themes include religion and dissent, the organisation of the rural community with its hierarchy of landowners, businessmen, labourers and servants; the differences between the town and the countryside, with reference to trade and attitudes to change. But it is to be the new professional men who are the medical man and the lawyer where Harriet Martineau is to concentrate many of her debates. Through using a doctor as a main character she is able to portray how attitudes to health and new scientific approaches have to be changed to supersede folklore and old superstitions. It also allowed her a context to explore the wider implications for religious belief of scientific intervention or contestation.

So, within *Deerbrook*, the community, is actually a contradiction of those presumed norms associated with village life of comfort and peace, which have been set up within the opening pages of the novel. The perpetual image of the enclosed village is shown as one, not of

¹²⁸ Vineta Colby, *Yesterday's Women*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1974.p.231.

¹²⁹ Harriet Martineau's presentation of the doctor as hero figures with one of her contemporaries, Samuel Warren (1807-1877) as being 'new'. In Samuel Warren's *Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician*, first published in serial form by *Blackwood's Magazine*, he has a doctor as hero. The novel was published in one volume in 1839 and its morbid and melodramatic story provoked criticism from *The Lancet* journal for revealing professional secrets.

¹³⁰ Geoffrey & Kathleen Tillotson, *Mid-Victorian Studies*, University of London, The Athlone Press, London, 1965, Introduction.

¹³¹ Harriet Martineau, *Deerbrook*, Virago Press, London, 1983, p.1.

harmony, but one of potential destruction, where 'wars' are waged between families, within romance and marriage, the workplace and the home, between men and women, women and women. Gossip rumour and 'false knowledge' are the weapons used to fuel hatred and violence and far from being a place of contentment, Deerbrook is actually the site of a 'prison house of love'.¹³² Harriet Martineau, in *Deerbrook*, is concerned to show the effects of living in a small community on each and every individual. Also, she is able to demonstrate the implications for the inhabitants of Deerbrook of wider social and political movements, such as the Reform Act, 1832, The New Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834, the Repeal of the Corn Laws, 1836 and the Cholera Epidemic of 1836. So, once again, as author Harriet Martineau is concerned to interweave the real and the imagined, in order to teach her readers. Throughout the narrative the individual characters are positioned through, not just their beliefs but through their ability to take action on behalf of others. One of the key figures in the novel is the character of Maria, a lame young woman who is a teacher. Maria is represented as being 'very superior'¹³³ and placed in a different position from the other female characters because of her disability. But, Maria is drawn through the narrator, as being placed in a privileged position because of this mark of difference. At one point in the novel Maria says,

I am outside the game and why should I not watch others? Every situation has its privileges and obligations. What is it to be alone, and to be let alone as I am? It is to be put into a post of observation on others: but the knowledge so gained is anything but a good if it stops at mere knowledge, if it doesn't not make me feel or act.¹³⁴

Again, here the recognisable position of Harriet Martineau, Unitarian, but also, perhaps, there are shades of the emerging positivist who will, later, believe in the powers to observe, analyse and evaluate all actions objectively about human behaviours. The 'game' from which Maria is excluded is that of courtship and marriage, her deformity being presented as removing her from the realms of being regarded as sexually attractive. Her poverty and her ambivalent class position as the tutor in the family compound this lack further. But rather than these things being viewed as disadvantages the narrator is using this character to say other things. Maria is represented as glad of her fate for,

Women, who have what I am not to have, a home, an intimate, a perpetual call out of themselves, may go on more safely, perhaps without any thought for themselves, than I with all my best considerations, but I, with the blessing of peremptory vocation, which is to stand me instead of sympathy, ties and spontaneous activity, - I may find out that it is my proper business to keep an intent eye upon the possible events of other people's lives, but I may use slight occasions of action which might otherwise pass me by.¹³⁵

¹³² Harriet Martineau, *Deerbrook*, Virago Press, London, 1983, p.160.

¹³³ Harriet Martineau, *Deerbrook*, p.22.

¹³⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Deerbrook*, p.35.

¹³⁵ Harriet Martineau, *Deerbrook*, p.35.

And here, how similar is Maria's dialogue to that offered by Harriet Martineau to describe herself later in her *Autobiography* as being concerned with the 'serious business of life' which has been discussed earlier. Whilst Maria is 'out of the game' through lameness she is also, it is suggested, an outsider because she is a female intellectual. For example one reference in the novel suggests that, if Maria had been a man she would have been called a philosopher.¹³⁶ This, of course, can be read as another version of Harriet Martineau's own sense of herself which she was to repeat in her *Autobiography* and elsewhere, claiming that because she had remained single she 'is probably the happiest woman in England.'¹³⁷ Also within the *Autobiography* she was able to record her life as one of principle and conviction, 'it is only by taking our stand on principles, and keeping ourselves free to act, untrammelled by authority, that we can retain our power of resolving and working as rational and responsible beings.'¹³⁸ A feminist stance is obvious in both the novel and the *Autobiography* where female independence is the prerequisite both to think and act.

Whilst *Deerbrook* is Harriet Martineau's only novel, it was, of course, not her only work of fiction because the *Illustrations of Political Economy* which preceded it were 'lively novels in miniature, but complete with a cast of characters, setting, dialogue and plot.'¹³⁹ What is interesting then is why the author decided to embark upon a novel, its place in her perception of herself and the aims she had for this fictional presentation on her audience. The idea of writing a novel appears in the first volume of her *Autobiography*. She writes,

Great were my expectations from my novel, for this reason chiefly:- that for many years now my writing had been almost entirely about fact: facts of society and individuals; and the constraint of the effort to be always correct, and to bear without solicitude the questioning of my correctness, had become burdensome. I felt myself in danger of losing nerve, and dreading criticism on the one hand, and of growing rigid and narrow about accuracy on the other. I longed inexpressibly for the liberty of fiction, while occasionally doubting whether I had the power to use that freedom as I could have done ten years earlier.¹⁴⁰

So, fiction for Harriet Martineau, would offer her a kind of freedom from restraint and be substantially different from the work she had been previously engaged in. This other work was in an arena where she 'became the target for considerable abuse during her lifetime, particularly at the time of the Political Economy Series primarily because she wrote authoritatively about subjects which many of her contemporaries reserved exclusively for

¹³⁶ Harriet Martineau, *Deerbrook*, p.49.

¹³⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p.133.

¹³⁸ Harriet Martineau, 'On Moral Independence', Misc., 182 quoted in R.K.Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Victorian Radical*, Heinemann, London, 1960, p.32.

¹³⁹ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, The Women's Press, London, 1980, p.20.

¹⁴⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.2.p.107-8.

men.’¹⁴¹ There were also other events that contributed to the decision, which are useful to explore here.

At the same time as Harriet Martineau decided that she wanted to try to write a novel, she was also approached with an offer from a publishing house to become the Editor of a new Economics magazine. The terms for this were attractive financially and the magazine would also provide her with a vehicle for her ideas and opinions. To take on the role of editor would, she records on one hand ‘be a fine discipline of taste, temper and thought’¹⁴² but on the other would also involve, ‘such certain toil and bondage; such risks of failure and descent from my position.’¹⁴³ Most interesting of all for the purposes of this study on gender identification is the following comment from the *Autobiography* where Harriet Martineau writes,

If I do this I must brace myself up and do and suffer like a man. No more waywardness, precipitation, and reliance on allowance from others. Undertaking a man’s duty I must brave a man’s fate. I must be prudent, independent, serene, good-humoured; earnest with cheerfulness. The possibility is open before me of showing what a periodical with a perfect temper may be: also, setting women forward at once into the rank of men of business.¹⁴⁴

With these anxieties Harriet Martineau then details the advice she seeks from friends and family recording that most of the responses from the former were in favour of her taking the editorship. However, a letter from her brother James Martineau was to be the one that had the final influence upon her. His advice was to reject the editorship and to launch into her novel. This record of the decision making process is important for a number of reasons which have already been raised in part within this chapter. Firstly, there is the important demonstration here of Harriet Martineau’s consciousness of the perception of male and female spheres of activity and the inferred ‘loss’ of something specifically female if she takes on the career of an editor of a serious periodical. Secondly, there is the fear that she will lose the reputation she had only very recently acquired and how this had been established on the fact of her ‘difference’ as a female writer on serious subjects like political economy. There is a hint in ‘no waywardness, precipitation, and reliance on allowance from others’ that as a female she has had advantages or privileges which hereafter would be lost if she went into the mainstream of male professionalism - actually became a ‘man’ in a man’s world. Up until this point in her career her femininity had been an advantage. Even in her early publications she had been happy to masquerade as a man to get her arguments across but then had been able to use this further when her sex became public knowledge and she finally became accepted through her difference.

¹⁴¹ Gaby Weiner, Introduction, Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.1.p.xv.

¹⁴² Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2. p.110.

¹⁴³ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2. p.110.

What is paradoxical here however, is Harriet Martineau's total acquiescence in her brother, James's opinion. It is the strange paradox of the young, self reliant woman writer who had worked to become independent now acting in total submission to the views of the elder brother. In even appealing to him she is, of course, seen to be acting in accordance with what we may now perceive as 'Victorian mores', where the decision making powers rested in the hands of the patriarch of the family, be it father, brother or husband. It is also paradoxical in the knowledge of hindsight and very much in contrast to how, when it came to the rejection of her faith of Unitarianism, the older Harriet Martineau had the power of conviction to make her own decisions. She was firm enough in her own mind to do so, even though it was to cause a rift in her future relations with James Martineau. One further and more positive argument could be placed here, however, if we see the act of novel writing as a position where Harriet Martineau can continue to challenge and work through her ideas. For the use of the literary form was not unusual for, 'the novel and the poem were women's only instruments of social action in the early nineteenth century: literature was their pulpit, tribune, academy, commission and parliament all in one.'¹⁴⁵ This pathway would also allow the younger Harriet to maintain the approval of her family and hold onto a position of propriety in keeping with the moral and social attitudes which prevailed about a 'woman's place' during this period. For the novel form was beginning to be regarded as a common vehicle for women to use because it was also thought that, 'of all departments of literature, fiction is the one to which, by nature and experience women are best adapted for.'¹⁴⁶ Whilst this point of view is a debatable one, some conclusions can be drawn about Harriet Martineau's excursion into novel writing.

Ultimately in making this choice Harriet Martineau chose positively to be a woman rather than a man in terms of her perception of her 'public' self, and decided to use a commonly used female sphere to articulate her ideas. She also saw the novel as a means of escape or retreat from the world that she was currently engaged in. Her desire for liberty and freedom from the pressures of her present position are understandable perhaps, but there was also a very strong sense that writing a novel was seen as another area of solace. Having made her decision Harriet Martineau recorded how, 'the process was an anxious one. I could not tell whether I was equal to my enterprise. I found in it a relief to many pent up sufferings, feelings and convictions: and I can truly say that it was uttered from the heart.'¹⁴⁷ So the freedom that the novel form provided was not just one that is different from the grinding presentation of

¹⁴⁴ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol.2. p.111.

¹⁴⁵ Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, The Women's Press, London, 1980, p.20.

¹⁴⁶ George Henry Lewes quoted in Ellen Mores, *Literary Women*, The Women's Press, London, 1980, p.47.

¹⁴⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography*, Vol .2. p.113.

facts but was actually a freedom to 'write the self'.¹⁴⁸ This self was ultimately to be received by others in very different ways. One critic, Douglas Jerrold, commented following the publication of the *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development*, that 'there is no God, and Harriet Martineau is His Prophet,'¹⁴⁹ and there was high praise accorded Harriet Martineau by Matthew Arnold who attempted to place her within the context of debates which raged within the century,

At a time when the want of independence of mind, the shutting of their eyes and professing to believe what they do not, the running blindly together in herds, for fear of some obscure danger and horror if they go alone, is so eminently a vice of the English, I think, of the last hundred years that I cannot but praise a person whose one effort seems to have been to deal perfectly honestly and sincerely with herself.¹⁵⁰

Although called a prophet in her own time Harriet Martineau's legacy is that of the record of her life and its various manifestations. As an intellectual she sits uncomfortably on the edges of male literary and political circles whilst at the same time not having a 'real' place within a feminist tradition as it has been projected to date within a literary or feminist framework. Her convictions were those of a conservative reformer, in a similar mould to George Eliot, who is the subject of the next chapter. It remains a matter for debate as to whether Harriet Martineau was, 'far more representative of ordinary intelligent Victorian opinion that we might like to think,'¹⁵¹ or that 'Harriet Martineau was the only Englishwoman to possess thoroughly the art of writing,'¹⁵² as George Eliot herself was to claim.

¹⁴⁸ Discussions of the significance of this phrase can be found in Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1953 & Elaine Showalter, (ed.), *The New Feminist Criticism*, Virago Press, London, 1986.

¹⁴⁹ Douglas Jerrold quoted in Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Books*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1935, p.91.

¹⁵⁰ Matthew Arnold quoted in *Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1957, p.394.

¹⁵¹ R.K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian*, Heinemann, London, 1960, p.39.

¹⁵² George Eliot, *Letters*, Vol.2, in Gordon Haight, (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 vols. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1954-78, p.32.

Chapter Four

George Eliot, 1819-1880

It is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationship between these patterns, which sometimes reveals unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveals discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned.¹

There are very few books on nineteenth century literature which do not include the writings and influence of George Eliot. In the twentieth century George Eliot's 'place' as a novelist is largely undisputed and there is both constant academic interest and popularist developments with respect to reappraising her fictional representations and her contribution to the cultural map of the period in which she lived.² Feminist scholarship within the Academy has also been concerned to take a different route with the desire it seems to answer the question, 'Was George Eliot a feminist?' So, it could be suggested that in terms of a cultural chronotope, George Eliot's role in the twentieth century is partly as a representative woman writer onto which many and various groups can pin their concerns for that time whether it is to do with fiction writing, questions of gender politics and/ or issues of nationhood and narration. It is not possible in this short study to enter all of these debates with regard to George Eliot, nor to critique the extensive bodies of thought upon her as a central figure. What is necessary and pertinent however, is to focus attention on certain elements of these debates as they relate to this study on gender, writing, identity and religion. In order to do this a summary of some of the relevant points of the argument follows.

Elaine Showalter in her book, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle*, notes, with some humour and alacrity, the pervasiveness of the 'myth of Queen George' and the abiding interest in her with respect to issues of gender and questions of authorship. She suggests that one of the first things anyone encounters with respect to any study of George Eliot and her writings is the question of gender, identity and writing. The problem in fact of a woman called George.³ With hindsight and the benefits of scholarship, this taking of a male

¹ Raymond Williams quoted in Preface to Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, Routledge, London, 1987.

² By popularist developments reference is in particular to the process of constant 'revival' of nineteenth century 'classic' novels for television and film adaptations. Novels of George Eliot which have been adapted for television include, *Silas Marner* and *Middlemarch*. The latter in particular in 1994 by the B.B.C. led to a republication of the novel and a further spell for George Eliot on bestseller fiction lists. Academic scholarship continues with conferences, collections of critical essays and every year appears to bring a 'new' biography on George Eliot.

³ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender & Culture at the Fin de Siecle*, Bloomsbury, London, 1991, especially Chapter 4, Queen George.

pseudonym in order to veil the sex of the author behind texts, as George Eliot does for the publication of her first fictional work, *Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1857, can be regarded as a commonplace strategy undertaken by many women writers from this period. For example, in a previous chapter of this study, this strategy was initially also taken by Harriet Martineau and her original pen-name of Discipulus. There are also the more familiar naming processes undertaken by the Bronte sisters, Acton, Ellis and Currer Bell. However this rationale is not wholly adequate to account for George Eliot's case. It does not fully engage or explain as to why she did not revert to her own name, Marian Evans, in common with the other authors mentioned here, after her identity was revealed in 1858/9 by the publisher, John Blackwood.⁴ Nor does it account for the previous publications of works that she had undertaken as acts of translation having been published in her own name.⁵ Also, with regard to the debates raised in previous chapters that the pursuit of literature was increasingly being perceived as a fitting career for women if they kept within certain prescribed ways of writing. The keeping of the masculine name by this particular writer becomes an issue which further complicates debates about writing, gender and identity within the territory of respectability, acceptability, masculinity and femininity in terms of authority and 'place'.

Elaine Showalter's argument is quite helpful here as a point of departure because she suggests that George Eliot retained this name as a creative device to use for her own ends. Showalter thus suggests that,

George Eliot, whose real name, was Marian Evans, had played virtually every role of Victorian gender herself. On the feminine side as one critic observed 'she had created herself first as daughter, then as sister, and finally as a 'mother' to countless younger men. Yet the male pseudonym, the masculine authority she commanded as a writer and the range of her intellectual, philosophical and scientific interests also placed her in the role of the father.⁶

Of interest to this particular study, is the way in which these debates on naming and gender have also worked to narrow the career and sphere of influence of George Eliot. The intellectual, the philosophical and the scientific have all been subsumed into a hierarchy of discourses which privilege the literary.⁷

⁴ This act of keeping her identity secret and the process of its final revelation is discussed in different ways in a series of letters to Blackwood and others during 1858 & 1859 but it is actually George Eliot's friend, Barbara Bodichon who knows it is her friend's work when she reads the novel *Adam Bede*. See George Eliot, Letter to MME Eugene Bodichon, 5 May, 1859, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.211.

⁵ The Fourth edition of Strauss, *Life of Jesus* bears the name George Eliot, as does the First Edition of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*.

⁶ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy, Gender & Culture at the Fin de Siecle*, Bloomsbury, London, 1991, p.59-60

⁷ Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault*, Routledge, London, 1991 explores the full implications of Foucault's theories for feminist works.

Similarly, biographical writings on George Eliot have, from the very first portrayals like the two volumed edition published by her husband, John Cross,⁸ worked to constrain and confine the sphere and influence of George Eliot. In doing this they have narrowed many of the debates and connections which it might be possible to suggest are resonant and important in extending knowledge of the nineteenth century. Nearly all of the biographical works published to date are concerned to make George Eliot's life and literary career one that fits into the dominant image of the nineteenth century particularly with respect to issues of class and gender.⁹ Many of these follow a line of thought which is claimed to have originated with Henry James, that George Eliot was a good writer because she had a preponderance of masculine qualities, and that her looks had 'forced' her into an intellectual life.¹⁰

In an attempt to make George Eliot this coherent 'whole' there has been a move to make her 'respectable' and 'representative' as 'Victorian woman'. Such writings work to underplay and possibly to undermine the fact that George Eliot could be regarded as quite 'extraordinary' in terms of the dominant paradigms of 'womanhood' that are given to us of the nineteenth century, merely in the way in which she choose to live her life. Passionately, openly flaunting the morals of her day, George Eliot, woman, was not one of the renouncing heroines of her novels. Part of the argument of this study is to try and understand further how we know certain things. To think through how the past is or has been constructed for us and how in this process figures like George Eliot have been locked up into being safe literary figures. George Eliot becomes an 'angel in the house'. By this placement of her within the novel and within the debates on domesticity, Englishness and parochialism aspects of her work which could be viewed as radical commentaries on her own age in relation to questions of gender, religion and nationality get lost.

To begin to ask different questions about this figure also works to challenge certain receptions and critical positions on her work and, in fact, on the lives and works of many other women of this period. For instance, the critic Terry Eagleton, in his book, *Criticism and Ideology* asserts that the following judgements can be made on George Eliot as being representative of, 'evangelical Christian, rural organicism, incipient feminism, petty bourgeois moralism and liberal reformism',¹¹ through a reading of her novels. Whilst there are valid

⁸ John Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in Her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1. & 2, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11.

⁹ Two quite different examples of biographical studies on George Eliot exemplify this to some extent; Ina Taylor, *George Eliot, Woman of Contradictions*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1989 & Frederick Karl, *George Eliot, A Biography*, HarperCollins, London, 1995.

¹⁰ Frederick Karl, *George Eliot, A Biography*, HarperCollins, London, 1995 makes much of the comments from Henry James and Charles Norton on George Eliot's appearance, see Chapter four in particular.

¹¹ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, Verso Press, London, 1978, p.125.

reasons for these claims it can also be contended that each of these categories works further to distort and narrow the range and spheres of influence that George Eliot held during her lifetime.¹² It also works to deny the valuable insights that can be gained through interdisciplinary scholarship and the usefulness of reading across a range of texts from this prolific author.

If we, for instance, compare the writings on George Eliot from literary scholars with those we might regard as cultural historians one immediate difference is that she is moved from inhabiting a narrow sphere to becoming viewed as representative figure of her age in certain areas. Those concerned to chart, for instance, the social and historical developments in the century have used George Eliot as a representative figure. In particular her life has been used to designate a phenomenon occurring with regard to religion, placing her as an indicator of wider social change. Basil Willey maintains for example that, 'George Eliot needs to occupy a central place' when discussing the main currents of thought and belief in nineteenth century England, for her life, 'her intellectual biography becomes a graph of its most decided trend starting from Evangelical Christianity to doubt, to reinterpreted Christ and religion of humanity - Beginning with God it ends with Duty'.¹³ These works which have attempted to look across areas of scholarship are gradually becoming more common, for example the novelist and academic, David Lodge's, introduction to the Penguin edition of *Scenes of Clerical Life*. This chapter is meant both as a complement to and extension of such work but is also concerned to take issue with the ways already mentioned which work to limit vision with regard to the positioning of George Eliot and her writings. It suggests that the boundaries placed around George Eliot have also added to the problems of learning more about a period in the past and how this has been fostered by the needs or assumptions of certain academic and intellectual agendas in the twentieth century which have closed down areas which some assume to have no relevance to the modern world. For instance, perhaps for some scholars to open up debates about inter-disciplinarity goes against the grain of disciplinarity and authenticity as well as making perhaps less certain knowledge already in place. A more radical suggestion would also be one where the confining of nineteenth century women to literature rather than seeing their contributions to the whole sphere of intellectual endeavour works to keep women and their histories separate and tangential to the mainstream of culture. By combining an analysis of George Eliot's life, her letters and her poetic drama, *The Spanish Gypsy*, this chapter is

¹² It could also be said that even within the area of literary scholarship, the range of Eliot's contributions have not been fully explored to date, and that certain of her novels remain the dominant ones for investigation. For example *Middlemarch* and *Mill on the Floss* rather than *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Romola* or *Daniel Deronda* and her poetry, which have almost disappeared from view in the twentieth century.

concerned to provide an introduction to the possibility of there being another George Eliot that is worthy of our attention.

The aim of this chapter then is to raise additional questions regarding the placement of George Eliot and her work. Within the limitations of space, this will be done by looking at one of the classic models we are offered of her life -as one that mirrors the Victorian age itself - with regard to matters religious. It will work to suggest that the image of her individual journey from belief to doubt to unbelief as a hitherto simple paradigm is much more complex than it may first appear. Also, that through reading across materials which have often been ignored or marginalised by others, her letters and her poetry, it can be argued that religion remains an all consuming area of interest and knowledge acquisition throughout the life of George Eliot.

In common with the other women in this study, religious thought and community were empowering to George Eliot both with regard to her individual selfhood and self-assertion. Religion was also an important vehicle in empowering her to write for the public marketplace. Her early writings are published first in *The Christian Observer*. This chapter will also explore in more detail the contribution to English religious debates that George Eliot made through her translation of works by Strauss and Feuerbach, as well as through her own writings and conversations (via her Letters) with other contemporary figures. These works of translation are now almost disregarded in the critical works on this author, and this is to miss and ignore their place as crucial documents in the Victorian intellectual debates in search of religious truth and relevance. Further claims could also be made with respect to her connections with the work of figures such as Charles Hennell and Herbert Spencer, as well, of course, also her partner, George Henry Lewes, who were all important intellectual forces of their age.

George Eliot, a biography¹⁴ of influences

George Eliot was born in Warwickshire on November 22, 1819 and christened Mary Anne Evans. Her mother, Christiana (nee Pearson) was the second wife of her father, Robert Evans. Gordon Haight suggests that in having made this second marriage Robert Evans had 'raised himself socially'.¹⁵ It is to Christiana's side of the family that Gordon Haight attributes the brand of Protestantism which George Eliot was to be inculcated into as a young girl. Haight suggests further that the Pearson brand of Protestantism was akin to that depicted later

¹³ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1964, p.215

¹⁴ Unlike the other women in this study, the biography of George Eliot, as has been mentioned, is the subject of many studies. Here, it has been necessary to extrapolate those elements of the life, which will have specific relevance to this particular study, and a debt of gratitude is paid to the scholarship of the Eliot scholar, Gordon Haight, who has been used as the foundation for these studies.

by George Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss* with her portrayal of the Dobson family. Haight notes how, they revered,

whatever was customary and respectable: it was necessary to be baptised, else one could not be buried in the churchyard, and to take the sacrament before death as a security against more dimly understood perils; but it was of equal necessity to have the proper pall-bearers and well-cured hams at one's funeral, and to leave an unimpeachable will.¹⁶

There is surprisingly very little reference to her mother in any of the books written on George Eliot's life and the dominant relationships within the family grouping are emphasised as those she had with her father and her brother Isaac.¹⁷ The latter she adored from very young and it is recorded that she was heartbroken on their separation through the different ways in which male and female were educated within her family and in line with the ethos of the time. Also, Isaac appears to be both the object and subject of later literary offerings such as her short essay, 'Brother Jacob', published first of all in *The Cornhill Magazine* in July 1864 and her later work, 'Brother and Sister' published in 1874.

The Evans Family and religion

Robert Evans we are told was 'suspicious of all forms of enthusiasm' either in his politics or his religion and thus his brand of belief is one viewed as the 'old fashioned, high and dry sort.'¹⁸ In fact the practices adopted by Evans in most aspects of his life were those manners and attitudes of his employers at Arbury Hall which he aped without questioning. He 'had grown prosperous working for the aristocracy and held the same views as them.'¹⁹ A way of life not to be followed by his daughter who was concerned to ask questions at a very early stage in her intellectual life which interrogated the family faith. Interestingly this often manifested itself in her early letters to friends around issues of religion and creative writing. For example, in a letter to Maria Lewes, she says that,

Religious novels are more hateful to me than merely worldly ones. They are the sort of Centaur or Mermaid and like other monsters that we do not know how to class should be destroyed for the public good as soon as born. The weapons of the Christian warfare were never sharpened at the forge of romance.²⁰

¹⁵ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985., p.2

¹⁶ George Eliot, *The Mill on The Floss*, quoted in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.2.

¹⁷ This framing of the young female mind within the community of men is becoming a common feature in the research for all four women in this study - the influence of fathers and, or brothers, features in all their lives and effects their entries into print in the case of Martineau, Eliot and Kingsley. There is one mention of George Eliot's mother in what Gordon Haight claims as the earliest known letter of the author. This letter is to Maria Lewes and is dated 6th January 1836, and it discusses her mother's illness in some detail, George Eliot, Letter to Maria Lewis, in Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, p.5.

¹⁸ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.8.

¹⁹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.34.

²⁰ George Eliot, Letter to Maria Evans, 16.March 1839, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, p.8.

This claim can be read as ironic in the light of her later success of bringing religious matters to the public's attention both within her novels, her poetry and her essays. There had also been some antagonism within the Evans family caused by Robert Evans's brother, Samuel and his wife's conversion to Methodism. It is with these relatives that George Eliot was to correspond during her period of acute agony over the loss of faith she was to undergo in the future. The figure of this aunt has also been claimed as the prototype for the character of Dinah in George Eliot's novel, *Adam Bede*. Robert Evans was a staunch conservative who had a real fear of change, particularly any kind of revolutionary change which he had witnessed taking place on other continents. Gordon Haight suggests that by the 1830's he had been infected with and had 'felt the constant pervasive pressure of the Evangelicals, exerted systematically on the 'better sort of people everywhere'.²¹ This leads to the conclusion that whilst her father was not a very social man, the social life that he did have was linked in Coventry with the Church.

George Eliot's education

At the age of three George Eliot was sent to a dame school kept by one Mrs Moore and at age five sent to a boarding school run by Miss Latham, followed in 1828 to Mrs Wallington's Boarding School in Church Lane, Nuneaton. This was a school of some thirty boarders and the principal governess was Maria Lewis who was to become an important friend and mentorial figure for the young George Eliot. Gordon Haight suggests in fact that 'Miss Lewis was the most important early influence on the child.'²² After four years here George Eliot was then placed at Miss Franklin's School, Nuneaton. From this space the world became a broader one for her because at the school there were pupils there from both India and America although it is not recorded as to whether these children were native to these countries or the children of British nationals who had lived overseas. The curriculum was also extensive and included Music, Drawing, English, French, History, and Arithmetic. At an early age, most of her biographers agree, she appeared to have a gift for English composition and won prizes for an essay entitled, 'Affectation and Conceit' - interesting in itself as a first work now because of its focus on women and appearance. Also at this time that there is a record of her first work of fiction, *Edward Neville*.

Maria Lewis was one of the prime influences however on the shape which religion was to take in George Eliot's younger life. 'Maria Lewis's serious evangelicalism rested on the diligent study of the Scriptures'²³ and in this pursuit George Eliot would also follow, reading and analysing her King James Bible. As Gordon Haight suggests, this reading is in evidence in

²¹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.34.

²² Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.8.

many of her letters, a particular example of which is a letter written to her Uncle, Samuel Evans, on the occasion of her aunt's illness. She begins by stating, 'Remembering the Apostle's declaration that "to be absent from the body is (for redeemed souls) to be present in the Lord," and continues later with the hopes that, 'I doubt not, my dear Uncle, that you will evidence the possession of what belongs only to the Christian, "joy in tribulation", and that you will thus glorify the Lord God of Israel even in the fires.'²⁴ Maria Lewis is also seen as having a religion which can be described as 'mild and sentimental' with its emphasis on love and salvation rather than hell fire and damnation. Practices in everyday life included not only close reading of the Bible but also the visits to the sick and needy. This leads Gordon Haight to suggest that, 'the Evangelicalism she inculcated in Mary Anne was a gentle benevolence, more like the teaching of the early Wesleyans.'²⁵ Mary Anne was also to teach at Sunday school before she was twelve years old and Haight uses this as an example as being driven 'as much by desire to exhibit her learning as by her spiritual zeal.'²⁶ This interpretation of behaviour is further sustained by his conjectures in the same passage, that it is within these early years that 'can also be traced the habit of introspection, which led to the psychological analysis for which her novels are notable, and a profound concern with religion.' Whilst this may be reasonable it is worth noting how the format of presenting a biography works to try and make a linear narrative from a subject's activities. It then attempts to read and interpret these backwards with the valuable hindsight and 'readings' of not only the author's literary productions but also the many other versions of selfhood that have been offered. This seems important to mention because it also highlights the degree of selection and priorities accorded to certain elements in a life which are the focus for the biographer because, for the purpose of this study, Haight's later comments are frustrating as he mentions that one of George Eliot's pastimes was the copying of poetry into her notebooks from 'some evangelical magazines', which he does not name, nor offer any sources for this information. Of further importance to note and to follow up later in this chapter is the poem, 'On Being a Saint'²⁷, which he mentions briefly.

It was at Miss Franklin's school however that religion became an important focus for George Eliot's development. The religious life of the school was founded upon, and can be partly explained by, the religious associations of Miss Franklin and her family. Miss Franklin's brother was the Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society and one of her daughters had gone to be a missionary in India whilst her son had died in training for the

²³ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.9.

²⁴ George Eliot, Letter to Samuel Evans, 10 August, 1840, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, pps.13-14.

²⁵ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.18.

²⁶ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p. 19.

mission. The 'serious religion' was built into the actual timetable of the girls' days at the school with every weekday having a prayer meeting and on Sundays all the girls attended the Baptist Chapel at Cow Lane to hear Mr Franklin preach. Francis Franklin, we are informed by Haight, did not hold with the strict doctrines of the Particular Baptists but the more liberal tenets of the General Baptists. These General Baptists being 'in spirit' close to those of the stricter Evangelicals in the Established Anglican Church.²⁸ Haight notices how

conversion, the conviction that one was utterly sinful and could be saved from hell only by accepting the atonement of Christ, was the conventional beginning of the religious life. One feels certain that it struck Mary Anne suddenly and hard. Though she had never cared much about dress and had no beauty to be proud of, she now began to neglect her personal appearance in order to show her concern for the state of her soul,

and George Eliot, becomes what Haight describes as 'immersed in gloomy Calvinism'.²⁹ In a letter written to Martha Jackson in 1838, this is still evident in George Eliot's comments on a Christian's duty,

I think, too, that it is the duty of Christians individually to throw their weight, however dust like, into that scale which as Christians they must profess to wish to preponderate; not to take the low ground of considering things merely with relation to existing circumstances, and graduating their scale of holiness to the temperature of the world; but to aim as perseveringly at perfection as if they believed it to be soon attainable.³⁰

It is interesting to note that whilst George Eliot was on this particular track with regard to her religious life, her much adored brother, Isaac was imbued with High Church views. Their differences were not initially incompatible though because George Eliot actually 'had no specific interest in Baptist doctrines. She always regarded herself as belonging to the Church of England, of which the Evangelical Party was then not far in feeling from many groups of Dissenters.'³¹ There is however no record that she was ever confirmed and Haight here seems to change between taking seriously the impact on the young Eliot of religious differences and then maintaining that these were not of lasting significance.

Dutiful daughter - a period of consolidation of her religious research

When George Eliot was 17 her mother died and her own life was interrupted as she has then to fulfil her role as the dutiful daughter and to look after her father. Her religious zeal and 'evangelical severity'³² is said to have increased rather than decreased on the return home and there are several reasons suggested for this by the biographer. One of the reasons is the

²⁷ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.20.

²⁸ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.19.

²⁹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.19.

³⁰ George Eliot, Letter to Martha Jackson, 9 October, 1838, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, p.6.

³¹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.19.

³² Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.22.

assumption that she was racked with guilt at her mother's death and hence the biographer raises the suspicion that there may have perhaps been a buried or silent history of mother and daughter not getting on. There is no evidence provided for this interpretation and yet again the biographer's role in interpreting religious attitudes and behaviour as psychological predisposition is interesting. It is also important to note here that when she returned home her father appeared to be very generous to her. She was able to purchase whatever books she required for the educational endeavours she was to embark upon at home and he also paid for the provision of the services of a language teacher, Joseph Brezzi, who gave her lessons in Italian and German. Whilst Gordon Haight claims this stage in her life as one which marks a profound period of 'renunciation and asceticism' which lasted into her early 20's it can also be seen as a period of incredible self motivated and self determined educational study with her teaching herself Latin as well as learning the languages already mentioned. All of these endeavours had the financial support of her father. In a letter to her friend Martha Jackson she also discloses another of her projects,

I intend if spared to be busy with a Chart which I am anxious to complete and if I succeed to print it for a certain object. It gives a chronological view of Ecclesiastical History, and has not that I know of been forestalled. I have seen charts of profane History innumerable, or rather should I say secular History, but never one of Church History.³³

This chart is mentioned in subsequent letters between them and the plan for its execution outlined in some detail. George Eliot is to concentrate she states on the early years and within specific columns will chart,

the Roman Emperors with their dates, the political and religious state of the Jews, the bishops, remarkable men and events in the several churches, a column being devoted to the chief ones, the aspect of heathenism and Judaism toward Christianity, the chronology of the Apostolical and Patristical writings, schisms and heresies, General Councils, eras of corruption.³⁴

and that she will, 'make a break in the chart after the establishment of Christianity as the religion of Empire,...and have come to a determination not to carry it beyond...when Mahommedanism became a bosom of destruction in the hand of the Lord, and completely altered the aspect of Ecclesiastical History.'³⁵ This endeavour of Eliot's is similar to the researches undertaken by the other three women in this study. It works to exemplify how all four women had both the desire to *know* about religion as an historical formation as well as to *transmit* these ideas further, from their early years prior to their publications. There thus

³³ George Eliot, Letter to Martha Jackson, 27 February, 1840, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, pps. 8-9.

³⁴ George Eliot, Letter to Maria Lewis, 30 March, 1840, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1985, p.11.

³⁵ George Eliot, Letter to Maria Lewis, 30 March, 1840, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, p. 12.

appears to be a common thread here in relation to the self-education of women from this period and the shaping force of religious matters.

The practical brand of evangelicalism was still in evidence though and it is recorded that George Eliot also spent much of her time visiting the local sick and helping the poor and needy. Gordon Haight's *George Eliot, A Biography*, refers to her involvement in the organisation of a clothing club for the families of the unemployed ribbon weavers³⁶ and supplies further evidence of this practical Christianity in her participation in a clothing club for the miners' families at the Pudding Pits.³⁷ It is recorded that on some of her trips to visit the miners, who were Methodists, 'she was shocked by the apparent union of religious feeling with a low sense of morality'.³⁸ This reaction seems to bear some relationship to her own subsequent acts of renunciation that appear in the letters she has left. One example for instance, describes the way she did not go to the theatre while on a visit to stay with her brother in London but, instead, remained at home in order to read Josephus's *History of the Jews*.³⁹ On another occasion, we are informed that she is about to burst into a fit of hysteria at a party where people are dancing, because she feels that she has both disgraced herself and 'was not in a situation to maintain the Protestant character of the true Christian.'⁴⁰

Throughout this time she continued with her own creative writing, mainly in verse form, as she had done whilst at Mrs. Franklin's school, and in 1840, with the encouragement of Maria Lewis, she sent off a poem which is published by *The Christian Observer*. As has been mentioned previously in this chapter, the importance of the religious journal for her first foray into print is significant as a vehicle for her future development as a writer and is in common with other women in this study. The poem itself is however less remarkable. It does offer though a similar use of the romantic naturalism explored in Harriet Martineau's writings with regard to the individual, nature and religion, and has as its theme, the giving up of oneself to God. A brief extract exemplifies its concerns, 'As o'er the fields by evening's light I stray/ I hear a still, small whisper -Come away!/ Thou must to this bright, lovely world soon say / Farewell!⁴¹

Many of her family blame the Methodism of her uncle and aunt for the changes that

³⁶ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.29.

³⁷ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.35.

³⁸ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.39.

³⁹ It can be suggested that this early reading into the history of Judaism is important for the future writings of Eliot. In particular, *The Spanish Gypsy*, which is to be discussed in more detail in this chapter, as well as the later novel, *Daniel Deronda*.

⁴⁰ George Eliot, Letters, 1.41, quoted in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.28.

⁴¹ Poem extract quoted in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.25.

were taking place in her intellectual reasoning about the religious side of her life,⁴² but this may be insufficient. It is perhaps more apposite when plotting an intellectual life and change of mind to analyse more fully and critically the reading trajectory of George Eliot at this time as detailed in her letters and used within the biography of her by Gordon Haight. The latter, it must be said, whilst highlighting her reading materials tends not to draw any particular conclusions about it such as will be offered here. George Eliot's reading practices seem to begin to change quite profoundly in 1840. The list of books she purchased and read included her further reading of the Romantics, especially, Wordsworth. His work was to have a particular and long lasting influence on her writing which she acknowledges in her introduction to *Adam Bede* and elsewhere. She was also reading Keble's, *The Christian Year*, *Lyra Apostolica* and *Tracts for the Times*. These indicate her interest in the unfolding debates within the Church of England and their culmination in the Oxford Movement and the splits which were to emerge with the High Church Anglicans that lead to key figures, such as John Henry Newman, moving from the Established Church to Roman Catholicism. She was also reading Isaac Taylor's *Ancient Christianity* and *Physical Theory of Another Life*. The first is a text that is concerned to demonstrate that, 'the Church of the fourth century from which the Tractarians tried to derive Anglo-Catholic institutions was already corrupt with superstition'.⁴³ The latter is concerned with the problematics of the afterlife and George Eliot's interpretation of this was as, 'an imaginative anticipation of a world after death in which our duties would be suited to the assumed expansion of our powers'.⁴⁴ Other texts being studied by the author also include, *The Test of Truth*, a book for the use of Spanish refugees and a book called *Thoughts Preparative or Persuasive to Private Devotion*. On this Eliot writes, 'a sweet booklet of pious meditation adapted to accompany the Christian in all the windings of his experience'.⁴⁵

Alongside this theological interest can be charted a new interest in scientific enquiry, in particular her reading of L.Vernon Harcourt's *Doctrine of the Deluge*. This was 'important because it aimed to vindicate the scriptural account from doubts being cast on it by geology and to her, in her recorded judgement "seemed to shake a weak position by weak argument"'.⁴⁶

⁴² Gordon Haight cites how a visit of George Eliot and her father to her relatives in June 1840, results in her recoding that after this time, 'I think I was less simply devoted to religious ideas', *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.29. The key word here however can be seen as 'simply', for rather than leaving this to stand as a denial of faith, it could be read as a time of much more complex investigation and research for her, which her other reading at this time exemplifies.

⁴³ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.29.

⁴⁴ George Eliot, Letters, cited in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.37.

⁴⁵ George Eliot, Letters, 1,98,101, cited in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.37.

⁴⁶ George Eliot, Letters, 1, 34, cited in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.37.

It is also noted that from this period George Eliot also attended lectures on chemistry and purchased books on astronomy and geology. The importance and influence of this reading cannot be overstated in plotting the lifelong intellectual endeavour of Eliot. It works to substantiate her knowledge and investigations into the internal denominational debates that were raging during this period within the Church of England as well as the 'new' critical approaches to theology coming from Germany and from scientific enquiry.

Intellectual and social networks

George Eliot, as her letters testify, continued to correspond with Maria Lewis. She was also introduced to a new group of people who were to have a profound and lasting influence on the development of her thoughts on religious issues as well as those which relate to her own perception of herself as a woman, as a writer and as an intellectual. It is pertinent to note that these new networks of association were, at first, through religious links and educational affiliations. This was very much the case with her introduction to John Sibree who was a friend of the Franklin sisters who remained friends and correspondents of George Eliot after she had finished her education at their establishment. John Sibree was a minister of the Independent Chapel and his two children were to be fascinated with their new friend. Mary Sibree was in fact to go to Rosehill, the Evans' home, and be taught German by George Eliot even though initially her parents were concerned that her new status as a free-thinker might be detrimental to their offspring. They were concerned that Eliot's 'dangerous religious sentiments might harm her'.⁴⁷ In part their fears were to be realised not through their daughter's association with her but through their son, John's, correspondence on all manner of things but ostensibly to get help with his Latin from her. Haight mentions that 'young John Sibree ends up giving up his training for the ministry - partly a consequence of her encouragement for him to freely discuss his thoughts with her in their correspondence. She applauded his 'honest doubt'.⁴⁸ For this, the Sibree parents were to blame her totally. Other associations were formed with the Evans's near neighbours, Mr and Mrs Abijah Hill Pears. Mr. Pears was a business acquaintance of George Eliot's father and had made his living as a prosperous ribbon manufacturer. He also was active in politics in the Liberal Party before the Reform Bill and served the local Coventry community as Mayor between 1842-3. His wife Elizabeth Bray 'who came from another family of ribbon manufacturers, held earnest evangelical views'⁴⁹ and her brother and his wife were to 'be her most intimate friends during the next thirteen years' of Eliot's life.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.55.

⁴⁸ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.64.

⁴⁹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.35.

⁵⁰ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.36.

The Brays and the Hennells

Charles Bray had been converted by 'a highly intelligent Evangelical Dissenter'⁵¹ but had 'eventually abandoned Christianity entirely in favour of a sort of philosophical necessity'.⁵² The influences upon him are said to include the works of George Combe, the phrenologist and his own somewhat muddled thoughts on 'the rules of matter'.⁵³ These rules can be, with hindsight, deciphered as the inculcation of some aspects of positivism which Bray had read and interpreted to his own ends. He thus believed very strongly that 'the mind seemed subject to the same invariable rules as matter; one had only to discover the rules and act on them to be happy'.⁵⁴ Bray was interested in all aspects of social reform and was involved in the following areas of work on this behalf: freedom of religion, of speech, educational matters, labour relations, co-operatives as well as campaigning for the extension of the ballot. One can see how the intersection of his philanthropic endeavours with his thoughts on matters religious were of great interest to George Eliot whose early pious period had also meant her practical as well as her devotional participation. Charles Bray had published the first volume of his work, *The Philosophy of Necessity; or the Law of Consequences as Applicable to Mental, Moral and Social Science*, and was writing the second volume when George Eliot first met him. They shared an interest in the work, *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity*, which had appeared in 1838, by the Unitarian, Charles Christian Hennell, who was Bray's brother in law. Gordon Haight records in his biography of George Eliot that her own copy of this was bought in 1842. Also, that in a letter to Miss Lewis she records the importance of this meeting with Bray and how it might lead to changes which could 'startle' her friend in the future.⁵⁵ Hennell's book was a critical investigation of the Four Gospels and in the Preface states was,

pursued for some time with the expectation that, at least, the principal of miraculous facts supposed to lie at the foundation of Christianity would be found to be impregnable, but it was continued with a gradually increasing conviction that the true account of the life of Jesus Christ, and of the spread of his religion, would be found to contain no deviation from the known laws of nature, nor to require, for their explanation, more than the operation of human motives and feelings, acted upon by the peculiar circumstances of the age and country whence the religion originated⁵⁶

Hennell makes this statement even though his work on the Gospels found inconsistencies in the narratives of particular episodes and a number of variations across them. Basil Willey comments that the very act of this exercise demonstrates that Charles Hennell

⁵¹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.36.

⁵² Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.37.

⁵³ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.37.

⁵⁴ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.37.

⁵⁵ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.39.

⁵⁶ Hennell's 'Preface' to the *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*, quoted in Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.220.

must have been 'a man who must have abandoned all notion of Scriptural Infallibility'.⁵⁷ Hennell's book however, is important for Willey, and for this study, in that it is an introduction for George Eliot to 'the higher criticism'.⁵⁸ There is a further connection that was to manifest itself in George Eliot's later work as translator, for Hennell's book was translated into German and the Preface for it written by one Friedrich Strauss⁵⁹. It is also not just the book's content that is significant when considering its impact further upon Eliot here, but rather, also, its method of execution and the way in which it works to validate by questioning issues of difference and interpretation. For instance, those concerned with commonality between narratives of early religion and belief where 'the earliest histories, both secular and religious, of all nations, have been full of mythological and legendary stories intermixed with genuine historical matter: why suppose that those of the Jews and Christians are exempted from this rule?'⁶⁰ This position of cross cultural narratives is exactly that which Eliot was to go on to explore within some of her novels but very explicitly within the poetic drama, *The Spanish Gypsy*, which is to be discussed later in this chapter. Hennell's 'whole drift', according to Willey's argument, 'is to show how 'naturally' and spontaneously the myths grew up'⁶¹ and hence, again in the Preface, how Hennell can assert the following without calling into question the authenticity of the Gospels,

Fictions proceeding from such feelings must be of a different character from those thrown out in the mere wantonness of imagination. Hence the appearance of simplicity, earnestness, and reality, which in the midst of palpable inconsistencies, pervade the evangelic histories, and render even their fictions unique...In short, in the stories of the resurrection, and ascension of Jesus we see traces of the sentiments awakened in some inhabitants of an eastern and imaginative clime, at an eventful period of their country's history, by the life, precepts, and sudden death of one of the most extraordinary persons in history.⁶²

This early acknowledgement by Hennell of the transcultural nature of narratives, which he has deduced from religious narratives, can be seen to be a forerunner of debates within twentieth century critical theory on religious and secular narratives, where, for example, the French structuralist, Roland Barthes, suggests that,

narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men very different, even opposing cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good or bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like

⁵⁷ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.221.

⁵⁸ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.218.

⁵⁹ J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, as related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCMII, p.75.

⁶⁰ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.224.

⁶¹ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.225.

⁶² Charles Hennell, *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*, p.152. quoted in Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.225.

life itself.⁶³

And, within the work of George Eliot, Hennell's work can be seen to have had a significant influence in the way she then worked to interweave fact and fiction in the representation of her narrative of the past in *The Spanish Gypsy*. For, whilst she claimed that the poem was not 'a Romance', nor 'historic' in a letter to her publisher, John Blackwood⁶⁴, her later statement that sets the date of action as 1487 provides at least the illusion of a specific historic moment. She also claimed that, 'nothing would suit me except that moment in Spanish history when the struggle with the Moors was attaining its climax, and when the gypsy race present under such conditions as would enable me to get my heroine and the hereditary claim among the gypsies.'⁶⁵ Eliot explains how she felt she needed this particular moment in the past to have 'the opposition of race to give the need for renouncing the expectation of marriage'.⁶⁶ This justification is enlightening because it demonstrates George Eliot's keen awareness to identify moments in the past when issues of gender and race are operating within certain specific cultural configurations.

So, the influence of Hennell⁶⁷ and Bray are crucial determinants of future developments in George Eliot's intellectual life but there can be seen, as suggested above, that they are also shaping forces to some of her writing, its structure and execution. The circle of influence that she acquires via this connection is also important because at the Bray household in Rosehill, George Eliot met amongst others, Robert Owen, Dr. John Connelly (pioneer of humane treatment of the insane), James Simpson (friend of Walter Scott and champion of free elementary education), George Dawson (heterodox lecturer and friend of Thomas Carlyle), William Johnson Fox, (Unitarian preacher and a writer for *The Westminster Review*), George Combe, (phrenologist), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (American Unitarian, writer and Transcendentalist).⁶⁸ Further important links are her reading of the works of Thomas Carlyle.

⁶³ Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', *Image-Music-Text*, Essays Selected & Translated by Stephen Heath, Fontana, Glasgow, 1977, p.79.

⁶⁴ George Eliot, Letter to John Blackwood, 21. March, 1867, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.330.

⁶⁵ George Eliot in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.376.

⁶⁶ George Eliot in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.376.

⁶⁷ J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters & Journals*, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.76 also notes how 'In the Analytical Catalogue of Mr. Chapman's publications, issued 1852, there is an analysis of Hennell's 'Inquiry' done by Miss Evans...'. A version of this is then provided, which, for this study, is useful in the comments she makes on the Preface to the German edition by Strauss to Hennell's book where he notes that Hennell was unfamiliar with the works of German biblical criticism that had been happening concurrently with his own work and yet, despite this, 'that both in the principles and in the main results of his investigation, he is on the very track which has been entered on amongst us in recent years...' p.82.

⁶⁸ This breakdown is drawn from Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, and from her letters.

It is also through the Rosehill connections that she attended a service at the Unitarian Chapel and heard James Martineau preach. James Martineau's wife was the cousin of Caroline (also called Cara) Bray and hence, the connection within this intellectual circle of influence between George Eliot and Harriet Martineau. This relationship was to develop significantly enough for Eliot later to stay with Martineau in Ambleside in 1852.⁶⁹ Cara Bray was described at one point by George Eliot as, 'the most religious person I know'⁷⁰ and remained so despite the attempts of her husband, Bray and brother, Hennell, to persuade her otherwise. Her husband's comments confirm that, with her,

religion was not a question of theological controversy or biblical criticism, but a deep feeling and cherished home associations, and of convictions instilled into her mind from childhood under the influence of one of the most cultivated and powerful Unitarian preachers of the day, the Rev. Robert Aspland⁷¹

It is important to note here that it was Cara Bray and George Eliot who maintained a correspondence over the years. Also to comment that Cara Bray was also a writer and published works on physiology and morality as well as being actively engaged in teaching poor children in her neighbourhood.⁷²

1842 and the 'storm breaks'.

Most biographers of George Eliot note how she was to conceal for sometime the way in which her religious thoughts had changed and single out her actions on the 2nd January 1842 as a turning point. This is the date that she actually, for the first time, refused to go to church with her father. John Cross records how, 'this was an unforgivable offence in the eyes of her father, who was a churchman of the old school, and nearly led to a family rupture.'⁷³ The father's reaction was to make plans to lease his home and go to live with one of his other daughters as a consequence. Robert Evans appears to have been more concerned with the outward reception of his daughter's actions rather than with any deep concerns for her 'soul'. Gordon Haight encapsulates his dilemma with the question, 'How was he to hold a plate on Sunday mornings at Trinity, the father of an avowed free-thinker? He could see nothing but impropriety and rebellion, which he blamed entirely on the Bray's influence.'⁷⁴ During this period of change George Eliot communicated her thoughts and feelings in her correspondence to her most intimate friends, in particular, Cara Bray, Mrs Pears and Miss Lewis. Some

⁶⁹ This visit is recorded in Section 4, 'Someone to Lean On', Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.107.

⁷⁰ George Eliot in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.37.

⁷¹ *Charles Bray's Autobiography: Phases of Opinion and Experience During a Long Life*, pp48-9, quoted in Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.220

⁷² Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.37.

⁷³ J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.84

extracts from these letters appear in John Cross's biography. A critical reading of these appears to suggest that far from becoming the rebellious figure perceived by her father, Eliot, was, in fact, making a bid to become an independent woman who was working quite systematically through a number of complex and difficult theological issues. This is supported in one letter to Mrs Pears where firstly she describes herself as 'ivy-like as I am by nature, I must (as we see ivy do sometimes) shoot out into an isolated tree'.⁷⁵ She then continues that she has begun on a path that involves this difference being an assertion of intellectual integrity. She writes,

To *fear* the examination of any proposition appears to me an intellectual and a moral palsy that will ever hinder the firm grasping of any substance whatever. For my part, I wish to be among the ranks of that glorious crusade that is seeking to set Truth's Holy Sepulchre free from a usurped domination. We shall see then her resurrection! Meanwhile, although I cannot rank among my principles of action a fear of vengeance eternal, gratitude for predestined salvation, or a revelation of future glories as a reward, I fully participate in the belief that the only heaven here, or hereafter, is to be found in conformity with the will of the Supreme; a continual aiming at the attainment of the perfect ideal, the true *logos* that dwells in the bosom of the one Father...⁷⁶

These words seem to challenge the recording of Eliot's unbelief from this time and rather work to suggest that this moment in her life marks out a profound journey through intellectual enquiry into all aspects of religion, knowledge and belief. This can be supported when looking at letters written much later in her life where she was still committed in the pursuit of truth and still involved in an intellectual interrogation of religion. For example, in August 1867, she was in correspondence with Emanuel Deutsch who,

had worked at the British Museum since 1856 as a cataloguer and expert on the Near East...his famous article, 'The Talmud', published in *The Quarterly Review* for Oct. 1867, which caused six reprintings of the number and made Deutsch famous. Readers were startled by the parallels revealed between Judaism, Christianity, and other religions. The smooth grace of the style makes one wonder whether some editorial suggestions might have been made by George Eliot.⁷⁷

In a letter to him she is writing to reassure him about his work and to encourage him, 'especially, pray return often to that note of reproach for unashamed ignorance and insist that the conscientious effort to *know* is part of religion.'⁷⁸ This seems to suggest and further support the argument that far from having abandoned religion, Eliot still saw this as a vital part

⁷⁴ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.40.

⁷⁵ George Eliot letter to Mrs. Pears, Feb., 1842 quoted in J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCCCXI, p.85.

⁷⁶ George Eliot Letter to Mrs. Pears, Feb. 1842, quoted in J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCCCXI, p.86.

⁷⁷ Gordon Haight's notes of information on this entry in his, *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.334.

⁷⁸ George Eliot, Letter to Emanuel Deutsch, August, 1867, in Gordon Haight, *Selections from George*

of intellectual endeavour. Indeed, George Eliot appeared to be constantly using religion as a discursive framework and its legitimate status was primary for her. This is confirmed further in another letter to Thomas Clifford Allbutt, August 1868, when she remarks that through his reading of her books, 'you must perceive that the bent of my mind is conservative rather than destructive, and that denial has been wrung from me by hard experience - not adopted as pleasant rebellion'.⁷⁹ This seems an indication of the ongoing nature of her intellectual relationship with matters religious and her perception of her place within these. This is reinforced later in the same passage where she states, 'Still, I see clearly that we ought, each of us, not to sit down and wail, but to be heroic and constructive, if possible, like the strong souls who lived before, as in other eras of religious decay'.⁸⁰ Further on George Eliot writes that if she had the opportunity to speak to him again she would, 'like to express what I fear was far from evident the other night - my yearning affection towards the great religions of the world which have reflected the struggles and needs of mankind, with a very different degree of completeness from the shifting compromise called 'philosophical theism''.⁸¹ By this Eliot appears to be passing judgement on the way in which certain thinkers from the eighteenth century onwards were attempting to hold on to ideas of religiosity whilst ignoring the less rational aspects of specific religions. Josef L. Altholz in 'The Warfare of Conscience with Theology' is concerned to outline the debates on these issues and maintains that

Indeed, it was almost an article of faith that such a conflict (between science and religion) could not occur, that the conclusions of reason would ultimately harmonize with the dicta of revelation, that the facts of nature discovered by science could not contradict the Word of God who was the creator of nature. A clear position on this matter had been worked out in the conflicts with the rationalists of the eighteenth century, when it was the glory of the Church of England that its thinkers had met the deists and freethinkers on their own rational grounds and more than held their own. A line of Anglican apologists, from Berkeley through Butler to Paley had used the language of the Enlightenment to justify the ways of God to man⁸².

Eliot was aware of these debates and was also a product of the effects of the nineteenth century debates coming from philosophy by the 'new rationalists'⁸³ which she would present further challenge to. However, for the purpose of this chapter, this letter is also significant because it falls during the period in which Eliot has been writing and publishing *The Spanish Gypsy*

Eliot's Letters, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.334.

⁷⁹ George Eliot, Letter to Thomas Clifford Allbutt, Gordon Haight, *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.351-352.

⁸⁰ George Eliot, Letter to Thomas Clifford Allbutt, Gordon Haight, *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.352.

⁸¹ George Eliot, Letter to Thomas Clifford Allbutt, Gordon Haight, *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.352.

⁸² Josef L. Altholz, 'The Warfare of Conscience with Theology', G. Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume IV, Interpretations*, Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, Manchester & New York, 1988, p.159-160.

which is concerned with the relationships and antagonism between members of different religions.

These later reflections of George Eliot's intellectual engagement are however evident too during this earlier period when George Eliot's father enlisted the support of family and friends to get to the roots of his daughter's changing habits. One of these was Rebecca Franklin who also enlisted the aid of a Baptist minister who being well read in divinity she felt had the necessary intellectual qualifications to win George Eliot round. His comments on their meeting are recorded, 'That young lady must have had the devil at her elbow to suggest her doubts, for there was not one book that I recommended to her in support of Christian evidences that she had not read.'⁸⁴ George Eliot's brother Isaac was equally as concerned about his sister's free-thinking status but again, this has more to do with issues of respectability than real concern with regard to questions of faith. In particular, it seems, Isaac was concerned about what impact this would have on his sister's marriage possibilities. A letter from Cara Bray to Sara Hennell exemplifies this interpretation:

It seems that brother Isaac with real fraternal kindness thinks that his sister has no chance of getting the one thing needful - i.e. a husband and a settlement - unless she mixes more in society, and complains that since she has known us she has hardly been anywhere else; that Mr. Bray, being only a leader of mobs, can only introduce her to Chartists and Radicals, and that such only will fall in love with her if she does not belong to the church. So his plan is to induce his father to remove to Meriden where, being away from us under the guardianship of her sister, she may be brought back to her senses...⁸⁵

So, what appears crucial in this whole episode is the stand that the young woman, George Eliot, was making in terms of her independence of mind and spirit and how this had upset her close family. The latter appear to wish to blame this change on her 'new' friends and their influences. However what can be seen is the evidence that there was very little actual concern for religious matters from the family except those that were 'visible' to others in terms of what people might think, or in terms of the future prospects of the family through her actions. Whilst George Eliot's father was concerned about propriety and appearances, he was also concerned that her behaviour and subsequent removal from the family home would mean that he has lost a dutiful daughter to look after him. Her brother Isaac was alarmed that his sister might not be able to find a husband. The buried subtext here was his fear perhaps that he would become financially liable for her later in life, if this were to happen.

This family storm did break and lull however, with George Eliot ultimately returning to live with her father again. They did not find it easy to speak about their differences and, even

⁸³ Joself L. Altholz, *ibid*, p.160.

⁸⁴ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.41.

⁸⁵ Letter Cara Bray to Sara Hennell, Feb. 1843, quoted in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*,

though under the same roof again, George Eliot had to write a letter to her father to explain clearly what her thoughts were on the matter of religion at this time:

I wish entirely to remove from your mind the false notion that I am inclined visibly to unite myself with any Christian community, or that I have any affinity in opinion with Unitarians more than with other classes of believers in the Divine authority of the books comprising the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teachings of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as its materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness. In thus viewing this important subject I am in unison with some of the finest minds in Christendom in past ages, and with the majority of such in the present...Such being my strong convictions, it cannot be a question with any mind of strict integrity, whatever judgement may be passed on their truth, that I could not without vile hypocrisy and a miserable truckling to the smile of the world for the sake of my supposed interests, profess to join in worship which I wholly disapprove. This and *this alone* I will not do even for your sake - anything else however painful I would cheerfully brave to give you a moment's joy.⁸⁶

So here, George Eliot, very much like the young Harriet Martineau discussed in the previous chapter, is asserting her rights to freedom of conscience and is more concerned to be truthful and honest than to pretend. It was still very much a letter from a dutiful daughter who was prepared to do anything else but compromise her intellectual integrity to please him. The letter ends,

As a last indication of herself from one who has no one to speak for her I may be permitted to say that if ever I loved you, I do so now, if ever I sought to obey the laws of my Creator and to follow duty wherever it might lead me I have that determination now and the consciousness of this will support me though every being on earth move to frown upon me.⁸⁷

The letter was signed from, 'Your affectionate daughter' and is a testimony to the strong will and conviction that was further to shape and define the life and work of this woman writer. The incident of George Eliot not attending church with her father during this period has been made much of by biographers and commentators. What many of them fail to then note is the fact that this event marks an intellectual point of assertion for in the future George Eliot was to attend both the family church and to accompany friends to places of worship in the future. Basil Willey is one of the few exceptions to this and notes how even in later life she remarks that, 'she would go to church constantly,...for the sake of fellowship in worshipping the 'highest good', were there no reasons against following this inclination'⁸⁸and , further, that, 'for

Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.48.

⁸⁶ George Eliot, Letter to her father, quoted in full in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.41-43.

⁸⁷ George Eliot, Letter to her father, quoted in full in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.43.

⁸⁸ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949,p.250.

those without definite religious convictions, church-going will be better than mere negation'.⁸⁹

Female friendships & the translation of David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*

At the Bray and Hennell households George Eliot had met a number of important and influential thinkers of her day. These famous associations have tended to overshadow the important friendships with the Bray and Hennell women themselves, who were to remain her friends throughout her life and with whom she shared some of the most intimate details of her life and thoughts. It was also through her associations with them that her next journey into publication was to happen with the task of translating David Friedrich Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, which was published in 1846. Basil Willey calls this book, 'one of the landmarks and turning points of nineteenth century religious thought'⁹⁰ and with this in mind, the way in which George Eliot becomes the influential link in the nineteenth century cannot be overstated in terms of gender and the history of religion. For whilst the biographer and Eliot scholar, Gordon Haight, does plot the trajectory of authorship for the Strauss translation, there is no comment on what must surely have been an unusual sphere of influence for women during this period. The powerful position of the translator is an area perhaps underemphasised in some areas of scholarship. This area becomes an even more fruitful site of exploration when the translators in question are women who have largely educated themselves both in the languages required and the intellectual territories of works being translated for an English audience.

Charles Hennell had begun the original translation of Strauss's work at the invitation of Joseph Parkes, 'a Radical politician who was a leader in the agitation for the Reform Bill as well as having married the grand-daughter of Joseph Priestley,'⁹¹ but he decided to pass this on to his sister, Sara Hennell to work on. After three months she passed it on, because it was too difficult, to Elizabeth (Rufa) Brabant,⁹² who was soon to marry Charles. Between them they agreed that Rufa would do the translation and Sara the revisions. This arrangement still proved to be too much and by the end of April, 1844, the translation had been passed on to George Eliot. The latter, in a letter to Sara Hennell at this time, remarks of this half - begun project that, 'My first page is 257. Will you be so kind as to ascertain how far Mrs.H's translation has proceeded, and send me the intermediate pages? Perhaps, however, I had better

⁸⁹ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.250.

⁹⁰ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.230.

⁹¹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.52. What are also beginning to emerge in this particular study are the interconnections between the lives and friendships of these intellectual women. Here, for instance, the link between Priestley's influence on Harriet Martineau and the later connections between her, Eliot and the grand-daughter.

⁹² Gordon Haight notes that Rufa Brabant's father, Robert Brabant, M.D., Edinburgh, was a friend of Strauss as well as having been doctor to Thomas More and S.J.Coleridge, in *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.29.

translate the whole...'.⁹³ The letters that continue throughout this period between them are full of exchanges on issues of translation and the minute detail of the manuscript in process, so, in some respects the project remains a collaborative one. In a letter from Eliot to Sara there is also a rather pointed comment on gender and authorship, 'I do not think it was kind to Strauss (I knew he was handsome) to tell him that a young lady was translating his book. I am sure he must have some twinges of alarm to think he was dependent on that most contemptible specimen of the human being for his English reputation'.⁹⁴ This enigmatic comment is not repeated or picked up on by either them or any future biographers but it seems essential to note the translator's own view of how female authorship was still regarded. It may also be the reason why, on completion the book was published as, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined by David Friedrich Strauss*. Translated from the Fourth German Edition, in Three Volumes by Chapman Brothers, 121 Newgate Street, London, MDCCCXLVI, and in this first print, her name did not appear. George Eliot was paid £20 for her two year labour which had been a mixed blessing of enjoyment and stress. She states herself that, 'I am never pained when I think Strauss right - but in many cases I think him wrong, as every man must be in working out into detail an idea which has general truth, but is only one element in a perfect theory - not a perfect theory in itself'.⁹⁵ Later as she is beginning to get anxious with the publication date in sight, Sara Hennell writes that she, 'says she is Strauss-sick - it makes her ill dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion and only the sight of the Christ image and picture make her endure it.'⁹⁶ (The Christ image mentioned was 'a cast, 20 inches high, of Thorwaldsen's grand figure of the risen Christ,' which was placed in view in her study at Foleshill.⁹⁷) This ambivalence or duality is further endorsed by Cross when, in his biography of his wife, he records how, 'the completion of the translation of Strauss is another milestone passed in the life journey of George Eliot, and the comparatively buoyant tone of the letters immediately following makes us feel that the galled neck is out of the yoke for a time'.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, the work was a success and George Eliot was delighted with some of the reviews that were published. She was particularly gleeful that one reviewer had attributed to

⁹³ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, April, 1844, Gordon Haight, *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.29.

⁹⁴ George Eliot to Sara Hennell, Dec. 1844, in J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her letters and Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.103.

⁹⁵ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, 1845, in J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.108.

⁹⁶ Sara Hennell, Letter to Mrs Bray, Feb 1846, in J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.112.

⁹⁷ This detail is added by J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.112.

⁹⁸ John Cross, introduction to Chapter 3, *George Eliot's Life As Related in her Letters & Journals*, Vol.1., William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.118.

Strauss something that she, as translator, had actually added and this was recorded in a letter to Sara Hennell in November, 1846,

The review of Strauss contains some very just remarks - though, on the whole, I think it is shallow, and in many cases unfair. The praise it gives to the translation is just what I should have wished - indeed I cannot imagine anything more gratifying in the way of laudation. Is it not droll that Wicksteed should have chosen one of my interpolations, or rather paraphrases, to dilate on. The expression 'granite', applied to the sayings of Jesus, is nowhere used by Strauss, but is an impudent addition of mine to eke out his metaphor⁹⁹

This insight works further to support the earlier argument in this chapter about the power of the translator in this work. Further emphasis on the work of the translator appears in another review published in *Prospective* and it is one that John Cross includes in full in his *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Journals and Letters*. It reads,

A faithful, elegant and scholarlike translation. Whoever reads these volumes without any reference to the German must be pleased with the easy, perspicacious, idiomatic, and harmonious force of the English style. But he will be more satisfied when, on turning to the original, he finds that the rendering is word for word, thought for thought, and sentence for sentence. In preparing so beautiful a rendering as the present, the difficulties can have been neither few nor small in the way of preserving in various parts of the work, the exactness of the translation, combined with that uniform harmony and clearness of style which imparts to the volumes before us the air and spirit of an original. Though the translator never obtrudes himself upon the reader with any notes or comments of his own, yet he is evidently a man who has a familiar knowledge of the whole subject; and if the work be the joint production of several hands, moving in concert, the passages of a specifically scholastic character, at least have received their version from a discerning and well informed theologian. Indeed Strauss may well say, as he does in the notice which he writes for the English edition, that, as far as he has examined it, the translation is 'et accurata et perspicua.'¹⁰⁰

This review is interesting in the proportion of concentration on the translator's function and ability rather than the content of Strauss's ideas and also because of the explicit gender assumptions that this knowledgeable book must have been written by a man, and a theologian at that. The translation of Strauss's work was then a very important turning point in George Eliot's life as a writer. It was also a crucial step in the continuing formation of her ideas about religion and her later interpretations and use of these ideas within her own creative works. *The Life of Jesus* was essentially a critical work of textual and theological criticism and Strauss's statement in the Preface to his First edition provides this very succinctly. He writes that, the new point of view, which must take the place of the above (the rationalist and the mystical philosophical approaches), is the mythical... it is not by any means meant that the whole history of Jesus is to be represented as mythical, but only that every part of it is to be subjected to a

⁹⁹ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, Nov. 1846, J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life As Related in her Letters & Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.122.

¹⁰⁰ Review of 'The Life of Jesus' in *Prospective*, quoted in full in J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life As Related in her Letters & Journals*, Vol. 1. William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.122.

critical examination, to ascertain whether it have not some admixture of the mythical.¹⁰¹

The main premise that Strauss outlines throughout this work is that religion has been 'resting on written records'¹⁰² which have prolonged its sphere of influence and that now, in his own age, there may be a discrepancy between the representations and the notions of more advanced periods of mental development which have happened. It is a work that can be read now as a precursor of textual criticism whereas in its own day it was positioned as representative of the 'higher criticism' of the Bible. Strauss was concerned to analyse not only the language and the images used in the Gospels but also to track the history of the reception of these works during particular historical periods. At heart he was concerned with the issues of fact and fiction and the role of representation and narrative. For example, in Part 6 of *The Life of Jesus*, he explores the work of Dr. Paulus and the commentary on the Gospels in 1800, when it was felt necessary 'for bible critic to distinguish between fact and opinion. Fact, that which has been actually experienced internally or externally by participants of an event and opinion being the interpretation of event and the supposed causes referred to by participants or narrators.'¹⁰³ From this position, Strauss then works through to the rise of what he calls the 'mythical mode of interpreting the Sacred History'¹⁰⁴ that presents itself in the works of Gabler, Schelling and Bauer in the 1820's and of how the latter suggests that, 'the earliest records of all nations are mythical.'¹⁰⁵ Strauss then continues by making distinctions between several kinds of myth,

Historical mythi-narratives of real events coloured by the light of antiquity, which confounded the divine and the human, the natural and the supernatural. The Philosophical mythi- a clothe in the garb of historical narrative a simple thought or an idea of the time. Poetical mythi-historical and philosophical mythi blended together and partly embellished by the creations of the imagination...¹⁰⁶

and it is in this last kind of myth, the poetical, where Strauss asserts that fact and fiction have been obscured.

The main thesis of Strauss's work according to Basil Willey was to examine how, 'everywhere, as experience widens and knowledge grows more scientific, early sacred records

¹⁰¹ Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, Preface to the First Edition, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, Vol.1, Chapman Bros, MDCCCXLV

¹⁰² Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, Vol.1, Chapman Bros., MDCCCXLV, p.1.

¹⁰³ Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, Vol.1. Chapman & Bros, MDCCCXLV, Fourth Edition, translated by George Eliot, p.18.

¹⁰⁴ Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, Vol.1. Chapman & Bros, MDCCCXLV, Fourth Edition, translated by George Eliot, Part 8, p.24.

¹⁰⁵ Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, Vol.1. Chapman & Bros, MDCCCXLV, Fourth Edition, Translated by George Eliot, p.25.

¹⁰⁶ Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, Vol.1., Chapman & Bros, MDCCCXLV, Fourth Edition, Translated by George Eliot, pp.26-28.

and myths have somehow to be reconciled with more advanced notions and the process of 'interpretation' begins.'¹⁰⁷ Strauss identified one of the problems of his own age as the failure to regard the role of myths as imaginative symbols in a time when, 'all things are linked together by a chain of causes and effects, which suffers no interruption...this conviction is so much a habit of thought with the modern world, that in actual life, the belief in a supernatural manifestation, an immediate divine agency, is at once attributed to ignorance or imposture.'¹⁰⁸

And this, as Basil Willey again notes, is the central importance of Strauss's work that,

We are now given the key to the problem: we must prepare ourselves to find that the Scriptural miracles are not conscious fictions, not exaggerations of real occurrences, but *myths*, that is imaginative symbols - standing not for matters of fact, but for facts of mind, experiences, states of feeling. It should be in no way startling to find that Judaism and Christianity have their myths: myth grows from the very heart of religious experience, and is of its essence, since religion (not theology) apprehends truth not as a naked concept but through image and symbol. Myth expresses religious experience, philosophical ideas and historical events, in the concrete form most congenial to the mental habit of the time which gives it birth. Thus, with genuine myth there is complete unconsciousness, spontaneity, and necessity in the process of its formation.¹⁰⁹

So, rather than Strauss working to undermine the role of myth in the construction of religion, he was evaluating its centrality within the context of intellectual thought and development. This is demonstrated in the final pages of the book where Strauss suggests that as the critic,

in proportion as he is distinguished from the naturalistic theologian and the free-thinker, filled with veneration for every religion, and especially for the substance of the sublimest of all religions, Christianity, which he perceives to be identical with the deepest philosophic truth; and hence, after having in the course of his criticism exhibited only the differences between his conviction and the historical belief of the Christian, he will feel urged to place that identity in a fresh light.¹¹⁰

Strauss was thus concerned to evaluate religion as 'a mental product rather than a piece of history'¹¹¹ and this is highly significant and pertinent to the translator, George Eliot, who in later life was to assert a similar claim in one of her letters to Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1869

And that thought lies very close to what you say as to your wonder or conjecture concerning my religious point of view. I believe that religion too has to be modified - 'developed', according to the dominant phrase - and that a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent, must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly

¹⁰⁷ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.232.

¹⁰⁸ Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, Vol.1, Chapman Bros., London, MDCCCXLU, Fourth Edition, Translated by George Eliot, p.71.

¹⁰⁹ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.234.

¹¹⁰ Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, quoted in Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.235-236.

¹¹¹ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.236.

known to us, the difficulty of the human lot. I do not find my temple in Pantheism, which, whatever might be its value speculatively, could not yield a practical religion, since it is an attempt to look at the universe from the outside of our relations to it (that universe) as human beings. As healthy, sane human beings we must love and hate - love what is good for mankind, hate what is evil for mankind. For years of my youth I dwelt in dreams of a pantheistic sort, falsely supporting that I was enlarging my sympathy. *But I have travelled far away from that time.* (italics added)¹¹²

This indicates the persistence of George Eliot's intellectual involvement with religion as a knowledge base but also with the need for this to be made manifest in practical ways of living and to be constantly in a state of development. There is also here the employment of the metaphor of travelling, mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, as a recognition of the women in this study of their spiritual and intellectual journeys to self identity. The quotation also indicates the journey that George Eliot has undergone since her translation of Strauss. A journey towards what was to be called, the religion of humanity and the further influence of the work of Feuerbach's, *Essence of Christianity*, a work, which again she translates into English and which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Further Intellectual Developments and Influences

Whilst there are eight years in between the translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* and Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* there can be seen a continuum of thought which was at work which affected George Eliot and her ideas about religion. For, during these years she was also to undergo both personal loss, in the death of her father, and further personal development with respect to her social and intellectual world expanding to include many of the key figures of her own age. It is necessary to summarise some of these events and their inter-relationships as they are later to be seen as relevant to the connections being forged in this particular study. After the success of the translation of Strauss, George Eliot returned to her own reading schedule as well as becoming involved in writing articles for Charles Bray's weekly newspaper, *The Coventry Herald*. Gordon Haight's research suggests that there are a number of anonymous articles which can be attributed to her and that the earliest he has identified, 'is a review of three books: *Christianity and its Various Aspects* and *The Jesuits*, both by Quinet and Michelet, and *Priests, Women and Families* by Michelet, which appeared in October, 1846.'¹¹³ These activities are interspersed with travelling and her continuous correspondence with friends. In one of these, to Sara Hennell, in 1847, there is also an indication of the

¹¹² George Eliot, Letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, May 1869, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 195, p.359-360. This idea of travelling towards selfhood has been further employed in my chapter, 'Travelling towards Selfhood: Victorian Religion and the Process of Female Identity', in P. Polkey, (ed.), *Women into Print*, Macmillan, London, 1999.

¹¹³ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.59.

direction her life was beginning to take as she states, 'I think 'Live and Teach' should be a proverb as well as 'Live and Learn'. We must teach either for good or evil; and if we use our inward light as the Quaker tells us, always taking care to feed and trim well, our teaching must in the end be for the good.'¹¹⁴ Her span of topics was also at times quite overwhelming during this period as she turned her attention to literature and philosophy in the writings of Rousseau and George Sand as well as becoming quite a commentator on politics and class relations in France and England. For example, in a letter to John Sibree, she wrote, 'Our working classes are eminently inferior to the mass of the French people. In France the *mind* of the people is highly electrified; they are full of ideas on social subjects; they really desire social *reform* -not merely acting out of Sancho Panza's favourite proverb, "Yesterday for you, to-day for me"...But we English are slow crawlers.'¹¹⁵ These ideas were to be utilized in the future in her novels, *Felix Holt*, *the Radical* and *Middlemarch*. It is also through reading her correspondence that we learn that George Eliot is again translating, this time 'the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus' of Spinoza.'¹¹⁶ Of this enterprise she writes very little except, 'how exquisite is the satisfaction of feeling that another mind than your own sees precisely where and what is the difficulty - and can exactly appreciate the success with which it is overcome.'¹¹⁷

In 1849, George Eliot's father died and her anxieties about the impact of this on her life are voiced within a letter. She writes, 'What shall I be without my Father? It will seem as if part of my moral nature was gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming sensual and devilish for want of that purifying influence.'¹¹⁸ This concern is interesting in a number of ways especially in the light of the dispute between the father and daughter over religious observation and attendance at church that had occurred earlier. There appears to be an acknowledgement of the restraining influence her father has had upon her development as a woman, as an independent mind but also the constraints he has placed upon her with respect to her explorations of her sensual side. The latter is also something positioned here as something to fear. These comments on the influence of patriarchal codes and the dominant ideologies of

¹¹⁴ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, Nov.1847, J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.136.

¹¹⁵ George Eliot, Letter to J. Sibree, Feb. 1848, J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1. William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, pp.146-147.

¹¹⁶ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, April, 1849, J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1. William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.164.

¹¹⁷ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, April, 1849, J. W. Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.1. William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.164.

¹¹⁸ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, quoted in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985,p.67. It is also of interest to note that this letter does not appear in J.W.Cross's biography of George Eliot, where he has obviously tried to eradicate any sense of 'deviance' or 'wilfulness'.

femininity are to be further explored in many of her later fictional works and can be seen to be of paramount concern in *The Spanish Gypsy* which will be discussed later in this chapter. It is also interesting to note that concurrent to these feelings of loss and anxiety George Eliot's intellectual work is also concerned with questions of passivity and passion. Just prior to her father's death we are told that she was reading Thomas a Kempis, *De Imitatione Christi*, and that this book 'taught her that true peace lay in resignation -renunciation of self, an inner peace far deeper than any she had known at the height of her evangelical fervour, when she enjoyed being taunted with the name of 'saint'.'¹¹⁹ However, just after the death of her father, she was to be equally affected by another book, James Anthony Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith*, which had been published in 1849. George Eliot was also to write a review of this work for *The Coventry Herald* as well as writing a letter to the author. Gordon Haight writes of how *The Nemesis of Faith*, is 'the tale of a young man who, having been persuaded against his feelings to take orders, admits his disbelief in Revelation, and falls into an adulterous love with a wife of a friend.'¹²⁰ The book had caused much controversy and had actually been burnt at Exeter College in Oxford where Froude was a fellow. Froude was to be accorded the role as 'the hero of heterodoxy'¹²¹ but for the purpose of this study these influences seem paramount to the future development of both the woman, George Eliot, (who herself, was to embark on a passionate relationship with the married George Henry Lewes, which flew in the face of Victorian morals) and the writer, of renouncing heroines in many of her novels, but also of passionate rebellion in the figure of Fedalma in *The Spanish Gypsy*.

The provision made in her father's will meant that George Eliot had an allowance of £100 per year plus £2,000 in trust. This was to enable her to embark on a series of travels with her friends the Brays and eventually to settle for eight months, on her own, in Geneva. When there she 'began to keep her Journal, a little black book of about 200 pages in which for the next eleven years she wrote down her impressions of everything, her hopes and her fears.'¹²² However, these records are virtually lost because as Gordon Haight records in his biography of Eliot, 'Cross, after using it for the *Life*, cut out and destroyed the first forty six pages, the intimate record of her life from 1849-1854.'¹²³ These years are exactly those where her life as a writer begin to take shape when she moves to London in 1850 and begins to write for *The Westminster Review*¹²⁴ (1851) and the extension of her circle of friends and acquaintances as a

¹¹⁹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.66.

¹²⁰ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.68.

¹²¹ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.68.

¹²² Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.71.

¹²³ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p.71.

¹²⁴ A copy of the Prospectus of *The Westminster Review* appears as Appendix A in Frederick Karl, *George Eliot, A Biography*, Harper Collins, London, 1995. It is sufficient here to quote the opening

result of this. These include: 'George Henry Lewes, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Harriet Martineau, Francis Newman, Professor Owen, Cobden, Herbert Spencer, Combe, the phrenologist.'¹²⁵ James Moore in *'The Crisis of Faith: Reformation versus Revolution'* also perceptively points out how some of these influences would both be known by George Eliot as well as disseminated by her efforts. Moore notes that it is one Marian Evans who was responsible for the 'index to liberal studies in religion and philosophy' in her role as the compiler of the publisher's catalogue for her employer, John Chapman. A catalogue which included 'Froude's *Nemesis of Faith*, Newman's *Lectures on Political Economy* (1851), Greg's *The Creed of Christendom* (1850), and Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* (1850).'¹²⁶ It was also at this time that Eliot became aware of the work of Augustus Comte. Basil Willey writes of how,

Harriet Martineau's two-volumed translation of Comte's *Positive Philosophy* appeared in 1853, just at the time when George Eliot was at work on Feuerbach; and the combined testimonies of these two writers, who, quite independently and along different roads, had reached the same conclusion, (that) must have convinced her that here, indeed, was an irresistible tide of truth pouring on all sides...¹²⁷

Translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's, *Essence of Christianity*, 1854

George Eliot's contribution to the challenges on religion through her translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* was perhaps the culmination of a series of debates which lead to the view by many that German criticism was 'inherently destructive and rationalist'.¹²⁸ She was to continue this connection again in her next work of translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, which had originally been published in Germany in 1841. Feuerbach had studied theology at both the University of Heidelberg and that of Berlin in the 1820's. At the latter he was taught by G.W.F. Hegel and F.D.E. Schleiermacher and Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* can be regarded as a work which developed further ideas that can be found in both writers with respect to the 'non-objective quality of God's existence and being'.¹²⁹ Feuerbach was to claim that even though neither Hegel nor Schleiermacher actually stated it in

lines from this where it is asserted that, "The newly appointed editors will endeavour to confirm and exercise the influence of the Review as an instrument for the development and guidance of earnest thought on Politics, Social Philosophy, Religion and General Literature; and to this end they will seek to render it the organ of the most able and independent of minds of the day."

¹²⁵ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.238.

¹²⁶ James Moore, 'The Crisis of Faith: Reformation versus Revolution', G. Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol.II, Controversies*, Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, Manchester & New York, 1988, p. 266.

¹²⁷ Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.238.

¹²⁸ James Moore, 'The Crisis of Faith: Reformation versus Revolution', G. Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol.II, Controversies*, Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, Manchester & New York, 1988, p.243.

¹²⁹ James Richmond, 'Ludwig Feuerbach', J. Whittle, (ed.), *Makers of Nineteenth Century Culture, 1800-1914*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982, p.208.

their works, they were both demonstrating that 'the Absolute Spirit' (Hegel) and 'the All' or the 'World Spirit' (Schleiermacher) were in fact not the God of traditional supernatural theism but Man.¹³⁰ Through the application of anthropology to Christianity Feuerbach's thesis worked to suggest that God was the symbol of human perfection and that hitherto God had been celebrated at the expense of man. From this position Feuerbach has been credited in the twentieth century as providing the link between Hegel and Marx with regard to aspects of materialism. For the nineteenth century George Eliot he can be seen to endorse her own intellectual movement towards an emphasis on human reflection, thinking and feeling.

Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* was to move George Eliot further in her thinking as it asserted the primacy of man over everything else. This view appears to fit with her own more empathetic aspect on life, for at this time her letters reflect a much more engaged relation with other people and their lives. In the *Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach takes some of the ideas put forward by Strauss a stage further. He writes,

the historical progress of religion consists in this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective, is now recognised as subjective; that is, what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived to be something human...The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or rather the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective - i.e. contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature, are, therefore, attributes of the human nature¹³¹

and hence, Karl Marx would claim that 'his work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis'.¹³² In her letters, we are made aware that it was to Sara Hennell that George Eliot turned for advice during the execution of the translation of this work, just as she had during the work on Strauss. In one letter to Sara written in January 1854, she writes of the anxiety she has had in giving Sara this task, frightened that his work would 'repel' her but pleased that this had not been the case and that her 'impression of the book exactly corresponds to its effect in Germany. It is considered *the* book of the age there, but Germany and England are *two* countries. People here are as slow to be set fire as a *stomach*.'¹³³ Another letter to Sara in April 1854 extends this line of thought asking for her advice on what needs to be changed for the English readership. It also provides an insight into the 'translator at work' as she states, 'I have written it very rapidly and I have translated it quite literally so

¹³⁰ The clarity of these complex relations and connections provided by James Richmond, 'Ludwig Feuerbach', J. Whittle, (ed.), *Makers of Nineteenth Century Culture, 1800-1914*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1982, p.208-209.

¹³¹ Feuerbach cited in Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.242.

¹³² Marx cited in Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, Peregrine Books, London, 1949, p.241.

¹³³ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, Jan. 1854, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.130.

you have the *raw* (sic) Feuerbach - not any of my cooking.'¹³⁴ She also writes of how she feels 'so far removed from the popular feeling on the subject of which it treats that I cannot trust my own judgment. With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree, but of course I should, of myself, alter the phraseology considerably.'¹³⁵ It is interesting to note here that the translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* was actually to have the name 'Marian Evans' attributed and as Gordon Haight states this is the only publication of Eliot's to have this.¹³⁶ Also, that it is Sara Hennell, George Eliot's confidant, who later wrote a review of the Feuerbach text for the *Coventry Herald* in which she writes that the translator is unrivalled in her 'power of dealing with the tough metaphysical German'.¹³⁷

The completion of the translation of Feuerbach and its publication also marks a break in George Eliot's life as at this point she left for Germany with George Henry Lewes and began the life which was to culminate in one of success as a literary figure. It did not, however, mean a break in her convictions and preoccupations with matters of religion for a letter written to Barbara Bodichon in December, 1860 notes that,

I have faith in the working-out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other church has presented, and those who have strength to wait and endure, are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls - their intellect as well as their emotions - do not embrace with entire reverence. The highest "calling and election" is to do *without opium* and live through all our pain with conscious, clear-eyed endurance.¹³⁸

George Eliot not only had faith in this 'working-out of higher possibilities' but worked to explore some of the limits and possibilities of these in many of her creative works. Whilst the novels have been quite well explored in relation to this,¹³⁹ her poetry remains largely under recognised in terms of its value in regard to these debates, in particular with respect to questions of identity, gender and religion.

The Spanish Gypsy: issues of gender, religion and identity.

In 1868, George Eliot published *The Spanish Gypsy* which Gordon Haight describes as

¹³⁴ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, April, 1854, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.132.

¹³⁵ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, April, 1854, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.132.

¹³⁶ Gordon Haight's notes that appear in *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.135

¹³⁷ Gordon Haight, notes in *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.135.

¹³⁸ George Eliot, Letter to Barbara Bodichon, December, 1860, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.254.

¹³⁹ Various critical texts include for example, S.M.Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1979, Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1987, Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1986, and Dorothea Barrett, *Vocation*

'a tragic play in blank verse, laid in 1487.'¹⁴⁰ The poem in the original Blackwood edition has 28 lines to a page and runs into some 358 pages. It is divided up into 5 separate books. Although the poem is in the main in blank verse it still retains the semblance of a dramatic production, mirroring its original draft inception, begun in 1864-5, laid aside by Eliot and rewritten and amplified in 1867 after a visit to Spain. There are explicit 'scene setting' locations and character changes with 'stage' descriptions and 'sets' written into the text. The blank verse is largely as dialogue between characters, internal monologues of the principal protagonists with further insertion of longer narratives of geographical topography. Within the verse form of the poem are assimilated various lyrics and songs that are performed by the figure of the poet, Juan, and a lame boy named Pablo. These lyrics serve particular dramatic ends in linking the past, present and future events with an especial emotional resonance similar to the function of the chorus within classical literature. Other features of the composition include the rupture of the blank verse with a transition to prose narrative and the occasional use of the epistolary form to act as a device to bring together the various sub-plots within the piece. For continuity, *The Spanish Gypsy*, will hitherto be described throughout this chapter as a poetic drama in order to retain and signify these attributes.

The Spanish Gypsy had a mixed critical reception, but five editions were published during the nineteenth century. There was no twentieth century edition until 1989 with Lucien Jenkins' publication through Skoob Books of *George Eliot's Poems*. There are still very few substantial works on George Eliot's poetry and no fully annotated critical commentary on *The Spanish Gypsy* in particular.¹⁴¹ In some respects it is possible to suggest that George Eliot had anticipated this. In a letter to Mrs Charles Bray she remarked that people had become accustomed to her being a novelist and one which 'they hitherto have found readable and debatable but will now find her becoming unreadable.'¹⁴² In the same letter she also implies

and *Desire: George Eliot's Heroines*, Routledge, London, 1989.

¹⁴⁰ Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p. 313.

¹⁴¹ Some references to *The Spanish Gypsy* can be found in, for example, R. Ashton, *Selected Critical Writings of George Eliot*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, K. Brady, *George Eliot*, Macmillan Press, London, 1992, G. Beer, *George Eliot*, Harvester, Brighton, 1986 and B. Semmel, *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994. Prior to this particular study I published an essay, 'George Eliot's, *The Spanish Gypsy*: a Neglected Work, in the *George Eliot Fellowship Review*, 21, 1990 and during the course of this research have had published two separate chapters in different volumes which pay some attention to *The Spanish Gypsy*. These chapters are respectively, 'Fedalma-'The Angel of a Homeless Tribe': Issues of Religion, Race and Gender in George Eliot's Poetic Drama, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Chapter 5 in A. Hogan & A. Bradstock (eds.), *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House*, Macmillan, London, 1998 and 'Travelling Towards Selfhood: Victorian Religion and the Process of Female Identity' in P. Polkey, (ed.), *Women's Lives Into Print*, Macmillan, London, 1999.

¹⁴² George Eliot, Letter to Mrs. Charles Bray, May 1868, Gordon Haight, (ed.) *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p. 346.

that economically she could afford to embark on a project like this that she realised will not bring her very much income. She writes, 'Don't you imagine how the people who consider writing simply as a money-getting profession will despise me for choosing a work by which I could only get hundreds where for a novel I get thousands?' The other comments she makes here though are less straightforward because she wishes to heap praise upon George Henry Lewes whom she refers to as 'her husband' (even though they were never formally to marry) for his encouragement with this enterprise. She also remarks in the same letter that 'religion and novels every ignorant person feels competent to give an opinion upon; but en fait de poesie, a large number of them "only read Shakespeare"'. This works to indicate perhaps a shift in cultural allocations of different genres in literary production at this time and to position the poetic/dramatic form as an outmoded and rather 'high-brow' pursuit. Whilst it is outside the boundaries of this particular study to follow this line further it is a valuable insight to the changes during this period that other scholars may be working upon. This statement can also be seen as part of a strategy or self-perception that the author was beginning to adopt. She states elsewhere that she 'chose the title, *The Spanish Gypsy* a long time ago, because it is a little in the fashion of the elder dramatists with whom I have perhaps more cousinship than with recent poets.'¹⁴³ This is supported further in her *Notebooks* which chart her reading in preparation to writing *The Spanish Gypsy* as including, Aeschylus *Theatre of the Greeks*, Klein's *History of Drama*, Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Agamemnon* as well as a summer reading more contemporary writings by Shelley and Tennyson.¹⁴⁴ A letter to Sara Hennell in March 1868 also has her remarking that,

I am reading about savages and semi-savages, and think that our religious oracles would do well to study savage ideas by a method of comparison with their own. Also I am studying that semi-savage poem, *The Iliad*. How enviable it is to be a classic. When a verse in *The Iliad* bears six different meanings and nobody knows which is right, a commentator finds this equivocalness in itself admirable!¹⁴⁵

This letter appears to be a desire to position herself with the classic writers, which in part has been achieved but not to date with regard to her poetry. It is also interesting to note her advice to the 'religious oracles' with regard to comparative studies in religion, which she herself had been engaged in throughout her intellectual career and which would become the

¹⁴³ George Eliot, Letter to John Blackwood, April, 1868, Gordon Haight, *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.343.

¹⁴⁴ The *Notebooks* refers to entries made by George Eliot which have been published as *George Eliot, A Writer's Notebook, 1854-1879, and Uncollected Writings*, Joseph Wiesenfarth, (ed.), published for the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, by the University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1981.

¹⁴⁵ George Eliot, Letter to Sara Hennell, March 1868, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.342.

foundation for the dramatic action in *The Spanish Gypsy*. This interest in other cultures and other religions was also shared by Mary Kingsley who is discussed in the following chapter of this thesis. The choice of the location of her poetic drama, in fifteenth century Spain is also an historical and religious context shared with the writer, Grace Aguilar, as discussed in the earlier chapter on this 'hidden' writer of the nineteenth century.

The influence of the 'old masters' is also apparent in the form that *The Spanish Gypsy* was to take which is explained in George Eliot's *Notebooks* with regard to her views on writing a tragedy. She records,

A good tragic subject must represent a possible, sufficiently probable, not a common action; and to be really tragic, it must represent irreparable collision between the individual and the general (in differing degrees of generality). It is the individual with whom we sympathise, and the general of which we recognise the irresistible power... The collision of Greek tragedy is often between hereditary entailed Nemesis and the peculiar individual lot, awakening our sympathy of the particular man or woman whom Nemesis is shown to grasp with terrific force.¹⁴⁶

These ideas on the common requirements for tragedy were further affected by the impact of a painting by Titian on George Eliot's second visit to the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice. The painting, 'The Annuciation', was 'over the door of the large Sala containing Tintoretto's frescoes'¹⁴⁷ and its impact on her suggested,

there was a great dramatic motive of the same class as those used by the Greek dramatists, yet specifically differing from them. A young maiden believing herself to be on the eve of the chief event of her life - marriage - about to share in the ordinary lot of womanhood, full of young hope, has suddenly announced to her that she is chosen to fulfil a great destiny, entailing a terribly different experience from that of ordinary womanhood. She is chosen, not by any momentary arbitrariness, but as a result of foregoing hereditary conditions: she obeys. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord'.¹⁴⁸

Hence, the plot of *The Spanish Gypsy* is driven by the narrative of the heroine, Fedalma who having been brought up in a Spanish household, on the eve of her marriage to a Spanish Duke, Don Silva, renounces her 'ordinary lot' and carries out the wishes of her Gypsy father, Zarca, to become the Gypsy Queen and the leader of her tribe.

In a letter to her publisher, John Blackwood, George Eliot states that her interest in Spanish history and literature was the basis of her present writing and that,

The work connected with Spain is not a Romance. It is - prepare your fortitude - it is - a poem. I conceived the plot, and wrote nearly the whole as a drama in 1864. Mr Lewes advised me to put it by for a time and take it up again, with a view to recasting it. He thinks hopefully of

¹⁴⁶ George Eliot, 'Notes on *The Spanish Gypsy* and Tragedy', *A George Eliot Miscellany: A Supplement to her Novels*, F.B. Pinion, Macmillan, London, 1982, p.127.

¹⁴⁷ George Eliot, 'Notes on *The Spanish Gypsy* and Tragedy', *A George Eliot Miscellany: A Supplement to her Novels*, F.B. Pinion, Macmillan, London, 1982, p.126.

¹⁴⁸ George Eliot, 'Notes on *The Spanish Gypsy* and Tragedy', *A George Eliot Miscellany: A Supplement to her Novels*, F.B. Pinion, Macmillan, London, 1982, p.126.

it...It is not historic, but has merely historical connections.¹⁴⁹

This statement of authorial intention can be seen to be highly problematic however because Eliot herself also contradicts these statements later. She acknowledges the crucial significance of the placing of the poetic drama in the historical context of the fifteenth century in Spain but she states elsewhere that,

nothing that would serve me except that moment in Spanish history when the struggle with the Moors was attaining its climax, and when there was the gypsy race present under such conditions as would enable me to get my heroine and the hereditary claim on her among the gypsies. I require the opposition of race to give the need for renouncing the expectation of marriage.¹⁵⁰

So, having said that *The Spanish Gypsy* was not 'historic' the centrality of a particular moment in history appears to prove otherwise. Also, that there has been a great concern of the writer to have this moment so that she could use the particular circumstance of the gypsy race to plot her narrative. George Eliot writes, 'I could not use the Jews or the Moors, because the facts of their history were too conspicuously opposed to the working out of my catastrophe.'¹⁵¹ A cursory reading of Spanish history provides the following evidence which George Eliot then goes on to use. The period in history she writes about was 'when a common bond of persecution united the Moors, Jews and Gypsies in late fifteenth century Spain during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella.'¹⁵² This 'common bond' was the struggle against a consolidated campaign for the expulsion of these races from Spanish territory through the declaration of Royal Edicts. The bonding then, in adversity, thus provides the historical backdrop for the action of the poetic drama. The differences between these groupings are, however, further explored and articulated through their racial inheritance but also through their religious beliefs and customs. It would be fair to suggest however, that George Eliot does not actually utilise 'history' or 'known historical events' as part of her narrative in terms of the plot or characters in the way in which say, Grace Aguilar does. The latter rewrites and hence reinterprets the past whilst George Eliot merely wants to situate her creative work in a particular 'historical' moment of the past for her 'fictions' to appear credible.

The major characters in *The Spanish Gypsy* are drawn in such a way as to be offered as having representative qualities of these different religious factions. For example, the

¹⁴⁹ George Eliot, Letter to John Blackwood, March, 1867, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, London & New Haven, 1985, p.330.

¹⁵⁰ George Eliot, 'Notes on The Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy', F.B.Pinion, (ed.), *A George Eliot Miscellany: A Supplement to her Novels*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p.126.

¹⁵¹ George Eliot, 'Notes on *The Spanish Gypsy* and Tragedy', F.B.Pinion, (ed.), *A George Eliot Miscellany: A Supplement to her Novels*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p.126.

¹⁵² George Eliot in Joseph Wiesenfarth, *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook 1854-1879*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1981, p. xxix.

position of the Jews is personified in the figure of Sephardo, the astrologer. His name obviously situates him within the history of the Spanish Sephardic Jewish tradition. In his first appearance in *The Spanish Gypsy* we are made aware that he has historic significance, when we are instructed to read Sephardo, 'a small man/ In a skull-cap bordered close with crisp grey curls' and 'pale faced, with finest nostril wont to breathe/ Ethereal passion in a world of thought'¹⁵³, 'as you read a word/ Full vowelled, long descended, pregnant - rich/ With legacies from long laborious lives.'¹⁵⁴ Being born a Jew, Sephardo carries upon his shoulders the history and the responsibility of his people. He is also represented as the especial friend of the young man whom Fedalma is originally meant to marry, Don Silva. In their relationship one can read a prolepsis of the later depiction of the mentorship relationship forged between Mordecai the Jew and Daniel, in George Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda*. However, the similarities are far more complex here because unlike Daniel, Don Silva is not to take on the role and responsibility for the Jewish faith for he has been brought up in accordance with his context as a Spanish Christian, a Catholic. Ultimately, it is this difference which results in Sephardo's betrayal of Don Silva for the cause of his own people. Don Silva initially fails to read this race and faith loyalty. He seeks aid from the astrologer as a confessor figure because he maintains that he needs someone who, 'is not a Catholic/A heart without a livery-naked manhood'¹⁵⁵ and who will be a guide in reaction to the preaching of his uncle, the Priest, Father Isidor. The latter is the figure that constantly reminds Don Silva of his rights and obligations as a Spaniard and as a knight. Father Isidor also reminds him that he is, 'a Christian, with Christian awe/ in every vein. A Spanish noble, born/ To serve your people and your peoples faith.'¹⁵⁶

It is left to Sephardo to educate Don Silva into the ways in which nationality, religion and loyalty work and part of this education is the point that 'naked manhood' is something which cannot and does not exist and that all men are predetermined by their past and their birth. Sephardo states that such a person, 'without livery', i.e. class, religion, inheritance, - would be a man but inhuman - a monster. Sephardo also assures the Spanish knight that whilst he is his friend, their friendship is secondary to his being a Jew, 'I am a Jew/ And while the Christian persecutes my race/ I'll turn at need even the Christian's trust/Into a weapon and shield for the Jews.'¹⁵⁷ In other words that if necessary he would sacrifice Don Silva, 'If Israel

¹⁵³ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Two, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p. 189.

¹⁵⁴ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Two, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p. 189.

¹⁵⁵ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Two, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p. 195.

¹⁵⁶ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p. 84.

¹⁵⁷ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Two, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London,

needed it.'¹⁵⁸ It is also the Jewish astrologer that reminds Don Silva that a child always has two parents, Memory and Tradition, and that it is important to live in the light of this inheritance in Reason.¹⁵⁹

In the representation of Sephardo, race and religious inheritance are as one element and this preoccupation with Judaism was to be returned to again by George Eliot in her novel, *Daniel Deronda*. A reading of *The Spanish Gypsy* provides a useful and crucial insight into this persistent concern with the qualities and principles of the Jewish faith as well as the constant investigations into religious difference and history. Earlier in this chapter the correspondence and relationship with Emanuel Deutsch and Eliot has been raised in order to confirm how she became 'startled by the parallels revealed between Judaism, Christianity and other religions'.¹⁶⁰ It is significant that this correspondence was during the period when she was writing *The Spanish Gypsy*. The analysis of the Jewish faith and issues of nationalism are also returned to again by Eliot, not only in *Daniel Deronda*, but also in a collection of essays, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, where in an essay entitled, 'The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!' she questions the prevalence of nineteenth century attitudes and prejudices towards the Jewish people and the inherent issues of racial jealousy. She points out that although the Jewish people have been persecuted and abused they are to be admired because of their exceptional qualities of absolute loyalty and commitment, 'a faithfulness and identity to its national traditions with the highest social and religious blessings.'¹⁶¹ She maintains that the survival of the Jewish race has been possible because of their tightly knit 'bonds of conservatism'¹⁶² fostered by race memory and 'past ties of inheritance both in blood and faith.'¹⁶³ These ideas begun in *The Spanish Gypsy* and of importance to the nineteenth century debates on religious pluralism have a heightened resonance for a twentieth century audience who have to read Jewish history back through the terrible events of the Holocaust. The concerns with nationalism and, 'the consciousness of having a native country, the birthplace of common memories and habits of mind, existing like a parental hearth...that sense of special belonging, which is at the

1868, p.200.

¹⁵⁸ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Two, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.210.

¹⁵⁹ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Two, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.214.

¹⁶⁰ George Eliot, Letter to Emanuel Deutsch, August, 1867, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, p.335.

¹⁶¹ George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1879, p.325.

¹⁶² George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1879, p.326.

¹⁶³ George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1879, p.331.

root of human virtues, both public and private,¹⁶⁴ are further explored within *The Spanish Gypsy*. The relationships explored are not just pertinent to the Jews but also to the Christians and the Gypsies. The only 'absent' analysis or representation is that of the Moors.

Like the Jews, the Gypsies are presented as a persecuted race. Also, both races shared in a belief of having a 'homeland'. Like the Jews, the Gypsies were a disinherited people for, 'If the Jews were a wandering people because of the Crucifixion of Christ, the Gypsies were a wandering people because, according to legend, they refused shelter to Mary and Joseph on their flight into Egypt.'¹⁶⁵ This use of Biblical myth is utilised by George Eliot in *The Spanish Gypsy* through the character of Zarca, the Gypsy Chief. He is described as, 'a Zincali Moses, the saviour of his tribe',¹⁶⁶ who intends 'To lead his people over Bahr el Scham/ And plant them on the shore of Africa'.¹⁶⁷ There is evidence in her *Notebooks* that George Eliot had read George Borrow's *The Gypsies in Spain*, where he attempted to trace the history of the Gypsy race and makes the claim that they originated in Egypt but felt that their homeland was actually on the Barbary coast, in Africa. Borrow notes that this belief may have arisen through their affiliations with the Moors. George Eliot can therefore be seen to utilise these aspects within *The Spanish Gypsy* where the homeland is indeed that of Africa and Zarca's people are helped to attain this goal through the aid of El Zagal, the Moorish King. The essential difference between the Jews and the Gypsies was perceived as the fact that the latter had no religious belief to bind them save in metempsychosis, a belief in the transmigration of souls after death into a new body of the same or different species.¹⁶⁸ However, in *The Spanish Gypsy*, George Eliot has Zarca proclaim that the gypsies do have a faith - that they believe in fidelity to each other: 'Our peoples' faith/ is faithfulness; not the rote-learned belief/ That we are heaven's highest favourites,/ But the resolve that being most forsaken/ Among the sons of men, we will be true/ Each to the other, and our common lot.'¹⁶⁹ This is the representation then in creative form of the ideas of the 'religion of humanity' that Eliot has derived from her reading and translation of Feuerbach. She writes in her 'Notes on the composition of *The Spanish Gypsy*' that,

¹⁶⁴ George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1879, p.339.

¹⁶⁵ George Eliot in Joseph Wiesenfarth, *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1981, p.xxiv.

¹⁶⁶ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.146.

¹⁶⁷ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Three, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.333.

¹⁶⁸ Joseph Wiesenfarth, *George Eliot: A Writer's Notebook*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1981, p.xxix.

¹⁶⁹ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Three, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.288.

the subject had become more and more pregnant to me. I saw it might be taken as a symbol of the part played in the general human lot by hereditary conditions in the largest sense, and of the fact that what we call duty is entirely made up of such conditions; for even in cases of just antagonism to the narrow view of hereditary claims, the whole background of the particular struggle is made up of our inherited nature.¹⁷⁰

These comments are particularly resonant in the light of her own recalcitrant behaviour with regard to the 'holy war' with her father that predates the influence of Feuerbach and provide another useful indication of the process of self identity that George Eliot has constructed for herself. She continues in the same passage by asking,

Suppose for a moment that our conduct at great epochs was determined entirely by reflection, without the immediate intervention of feeling which supersedes reflection, our determination as to the right would consist in an adjustment of our individual needs to the dire necessities of our lot, partly to our natural constitution, partly as sharers of life with our fellow human beings¹⁷¹

and thus continues to explore the relationship of the past with the individual and their sense of duty and responsibility. Hence, Zarca, becomes the embodiment of the Gypsy tribe within the poetic drama. He is first described as a man of superior qualities who has retained 'majesty' even when held as a prisoner of the Spanish, 'It seemed the soul within him made his limbs/ And made them grand. The baubles were all gone/ He stood more a king, when bared to man.'¹⁷² So, even without the outward symbols of ceremonial chains and dress, Zarca can be seen as a leader of men. The pride of the race is also present in the way Zarca and his fellow prisoners 'stand unmoved/ As pagan statues with proud level gaze.'¹⁷³ The representative qualities of Zarca are again shown in the first meeting between him and Fedalma. For the latter, 'the Gypsy's eyes/...seem to her the sadness of the world/ Rebuking her, the great bell's hidden thought/ Now first unveiled - the sorrows redeemed/ Of races outcast, scorned, and wandering,'¹⁷⁴ as he appeared to her as 'a dark hieroglyph of coming fate/ Written before her.'¹⁷⁵ So, just as Sephardo upholds the narrative of his race and religion, so with Zarca and for Fedalma (later to be revealed as his daughter), his appearance 'claim this festive life of mine, As heritage of sorrow, chill by blood/ with cold iron of some unknown bonds.'¹⁷⁶ The

¹⁷⁰ George Eliot, 'Notes on *The Spanish Gypsy*', J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters & Journals*, Vol. 2., William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.205.

¹⁷¹ George Eliot, 'Notes on *The Spanish Gypsy*', J.W.Cross, *George Eliot's Life, As Related in her Letters and Journals*, Vol.2, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, MCM11, p.205-6.

¹⁷² George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.51.

¹⁷³ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh and London, 1868, p.70.

¹⁷⁴ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, pp. 70-71.

¹⁷⁵ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.71.

¹⁷⁶ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London,

bonds we are to learn, of course, are those of birth, race and inheritance.

Fedalma has been betrothed to Don Silva and it is only through this first meeting on the eve of her wedding that she learns that she has a different past from that she has been taught as a member of a Spanish Christian family. She is, in fact, a gypsy even though as Don Silva claims she has also been baptised as a Christian. Father Isidor maintains that Fedalma is actually worse than a Jew for, 'She bears the marks, of races unbaptised, that never bowed/Before the holy signs, were never moved/ By stirrings of the sacramental gifts.'¹⁷⁷ For him then she, through her dark skin and her black hair, is the daughter of her race and as such can never be seen as a Christian. Don Silva is represented as the ever hopeful younger man who believes that things can change and be different whilst Father Isidor represents unchanging orthodoxy and some of the most dramatic sections of the poetic drama are the occasions of dialogue between these two characters. Their battle between tradition and orthodoxy on the one hand and rebellion and change on the other and the guidance from the narrator suggests that, 'wise bets will choose/ The churchman: he's iron, and the duke../Is a piece of pottery',¹⁷⁸ and by this it seems to imply that Don Silva is fragile and perhaps, slightly, ornamental.

The destinies of these representative types and their racial survival pivots upon the struggle, not only between factions but within individual dilemmas of identity and sense of duty. In this respect the struggles become gender specific in some respects and are offered within an interesting use of renunciation in this poetic drama.¹⁷⁹ Earlier in this section it was stated that George Eliot claimed that *The Spanish Gypsy* was neither historical nor a Romance. It seems appropriate to note that just as these arguments can be used to demonstrate the historical specificity of the context of the poetic drama so the resulting action that takes place can be seen to rest on the foundations of Romance. To be sure, it is a tragic romance but nevertheless the acts of love originally undertaken by Don Silva in order to remain with Fedalma are quite remarkable and very unusual in nineteenth century literature in many respects. For, it is Don Silva that is prepared to renounce his place in Spanish society as a duke and to follow Fedalma as she has to lead her tribe after the death of her father. So, not only does Fedalma forego the life of luxury as the wife of a Spanish nobleman, he too, attempts to live against the tide of his history. The act of renunciation for Fedalma is offered though as

1868, p.97.

¹⁷⁷ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.82.

¹⁷⁸ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Two, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.174.

¹⁷⁹ Mrs. Gerald Porter in *Annals of a Publishing House*, Vol.3, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1928 suggests that 'renunciation is the keynote of this poem and whatever difference of opinion there may be as to the quality of her verse, there can be no question as to the beauty of thought and political feeling that inspired it,' p.376.

a mixed blessing. She may appear to have escaped from the narrow confines of the domestic sphere and the role of the obedient wife. She has some kind of freedom of mobility outside the restrictive castle walls but now she has 'To be the angel of a homeless tribe'.¹⁸⁰ On becoming leader of the gypsy tribe she has to forego the personal pleasures of sexual gratification as a wife to become, 'as one who guides/Her children through the wilds and sees and knows/ Of danger more than they, and feels their pangs/ Yet shrinks not, groans not, bearing in her heart/Their ignorant misery and their trust in her.'¹⁸¹ Here then is represented the ultimate sacrifice of the private will for the public good of others through an act of duty. Ultimately though all acts of renunciation are offered in this poetic drama as doomed. Don Silva cannot leave his past and his Christian self behind and ends up killing Zarca, Fedalma's father. For this, she cannot forgive him and he returns to fight for his country and his religious beliefs in the pursuit of the expulsion of Jews and Gypsies from Spain. Fedalma, whilst offered initially as an alternative to the sacrificial heroines of nineteenth century fiction, also ends up as the leader of a lost cause, as nothing more than a 'funeral urn that bears/ The ashes of a leader.'¹⁸² We are told towards the end of *The Spanish Gypsy* that Fedalma will 'die alone/ A hoary woman on the altar step/ Cold 'mid cold ashes.'¹⁸³ So, in the act of renunciation Fedalma has lost her whole self and the future of her race has been placed in jeopardy because it now lacks a future, she has no heir, there is no male leader figure. Eliot appears to want to persuade her readers to think with their Reason just as Father Isidor and Sephardo have advised Don Silva earlier in *The Spanish Gypsy*. She has presented these arguments in such a way as to heighten the drama and the tensions between the private and the public lives of her characters. In doing so she warns that, 'Hopes have a precarious life/ They are oft blighted, withered, snapped sheer off/ In vigorous growth and turned to rottenness.'¹⁸⁴ The critic, Gillian Beer, suggests that this is in keeping with George Eliot's views when she, 'early recognised that the exceptional changes nothing. It carries with it no transformation of the ordinary. But outgoing to general rule it may actually have the effect of confirming the status quo.'¹⁸⁵ Hence, in relation to Fedalma, if we follow Beer's line of argument, her life is presented as a tragedy but it can also be seen as a triumph of tradition and the continuation of Spanish life as it has always been.

¹⁸⁰ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book One, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.147.

¹⁸¹ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Four, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.354.

¹⁸² George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Five, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.369.

¹⁸³ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Five, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p.370.

¹⁸⁴ George Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*, Book Three, William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1868, p. 272.

The Spanish Gypsy ends with Fedalma and Don Silva renouncing their love for each other and left to pursue their separate lives of duty. In this sense their roles are now 'not to please themselves but to embrace the highest and purest aim that life presents to them.'¹⁸⁶ The author therefore seems to be offering at least two separate points for the reader to take on board here. Firstly, that renunciation is to be seen not as a loss but as a gain. It is actually the transcendence of self (and perhaps, gender?) and the reaching of a higher self - a better self-living for either a great cause or for the sake of others. Secondly, Eliot appears to be concerned to highlight the connection that exists between the private lives of individuals and their public roles. In this case she seems particularly concerned to show that the duty to the public task is the more important. This is the voice of the Feuerbachian who in a letter to Thomas Clifford Allbutt in August 1868, after the completion of *The Spanish Gypsy*, writes, inspiring principle which alone gives me courage to write, is that of so presenting our human life as a help to my readers in getting a clearer conception, and a more active admiration of those vital elements which bind men together and give higher worthiness to their existence and also, to help them in gradually dissociating these elements from the more transient forms on which an outworn teaching tends to make them dependent.¹⁸⁷

The most significant words in this letter appear to be those of 'help', 'active admiration', 'bind' and 'higher worthiness' as they help to elucidate George Eliot's intentions as a writer. She was attempting in *The Spanish Gypsy* and elsewhere, to teach people a higher moral code for living than one which is based purely upon the gratification of self and selfish interests. A second letter written in the same year, gives this further support when she writes to the positivist Frederick Harrison, 'I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But it ceases to be purely aesthetic - if it lapses anywhere from a picture to a diagram - it becomes the most offensive of all teaching.'¹⁸⁸ Thus, in the 'pictures' created by George Eliot, there was an over-riding concern to show aesthetically how the individual life fits into the wider context. Her own journey with regard to questions of religion as the foundation of the intellectual have been brought to bear within *The Spanish Gypsy* where she uses 'old religions' and 'old kinship' ties of race to provide such a context. The omission of critical recognition to this poetic drama is one that works to lose vital links within the chain of George Eliot's career as woman, as writer and as intellectual. Throughout her writings, Eliot uses religion as a discursive framework. Its legitimate status is primary, but

¹⁸⁵ Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1986, p.201.

¹⁸⁶ John Crombie Brown, *The Ethics of George Eliot's Work*, Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh & London, 1884, p.63.

¹⁸⁷ George Eliot, Letter to Thomas Clifford Allbutt, August, 1868, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, p.352.

¹⁸⁸ George Eliot, Letter to Frederick Harrison, 1868, Gordon Haight, (ed.), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1985, p.318.

George Eliot was also subversively deploying it in relation to questions of female autonomy and their public role.

Chapter Five Mary Kingsley 1862-1900

I suggest that one could understand the life around which autobiography forms itself in a number of other ways besides the perfectly legitimate one of “individual history and narrative”. We can understand it as the vital impulse- the impulse of life - that is transformed by being lived through the unique medium of the individual and the individual’s special, peculiar psychic configuration; we can understand it as consciousness, pure and simple, consciousness referring to no objects outside itself, to no events, and to no other lives; we can understand it as participation in an absolute existence far transcending the shifting, changing unrealities of mundane life; we can understand it as the moral tenor of the individual’s being. Life in all these latter senses does not stretch back across time but extends down to the roots of individual being.¹

The inclusion of Mary Kingsley and her publication, *Travels in West Africa*, in this thesis fulfills the fourth criterion that Carolyn Heilbrun states in *Writing A Woman’s Life* mentioned in the introduction. Mary Kingsley’s quite extraordinary life with respect to her travels in Africa can be read as the culminating text of travelling towards selfhood that the previous three women had projected in the lives of their fictional heroines. It is also fair to suggest that when one looks at the life of this remarkable late Victorian woman James Olney’s assertion of autobiography as ‘the impulse of life’ itself is also a fitting testimony for Mary Kingsley. Some of the main considerations of this ‘impulse’ are raised in this chapter in the context of the interconnections between issues of gender, race and religion that a study of Mary Kingsley’s life and work offers. Issues and connections which in earlier chapters have worked to forge connections between the lives and fictional representations of the other women at the heart of this study; Grace Aguilar, Harriet Martineau and George Eliot, are in this chapter more explicitly forged through Mary Kingsley’s actual material connections. They are the issues and connections of her life rather than fictional projections or imagined selves. With regard to religious belief Mary Kingsley is also highly significant because of her shift in perspective from the family tradition of Anglicanism to her profound conviction that Islam was the resting - place for her and her beliefs in certain contexts.² In many ways by investigating her life and changes of opinion on religion we can also begin to make judgements about the general end of century debates about religion. How, for instance ‘the Empire was not only a vehicle for the export of Christianity, but also a channel for the import of other religions to

¹ James Olney, “Some Versions of Memory”, in Shari Benstock, “Authorizing the Autobiographical” in Robyn. R. Warhol & Diane Price Herndl, *Feminisms, An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1991., p.1041.

² Katherine Frank in *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988 notes how the whole subject of Mary Kingsley’s faith or lack of it is an extremely vexed and confusing issue. Franks notes how ‘Mary was reluctant to put herself on the line in the first place, and when she did, what she said varied greatly at different times and according to whom she

Britain'³. Of particular significance here, of course, is the influence of other cultural and religious traditions that, within this late nineteenth century context, are still largely under-explored in the context of women, religion and imperialism. It is also worth highlighting that whilst there have been a number of biographies of Mary Kingsley very little attention has been given to her place in this religious context.⁴ This may be because of Mary Kingsley's own criticisms that she voiced on her return from her travels in West Africa. She became a severe critic of the dominant ideology of the day about Africa and the ways in which Africans were perceived. Mary Kingsley, 'back home in England, will raise her voice on behalf of the African peoples whose ability to legislate their own lives is, in the late 1890's, continuously and fatally under attack by British, French, Belgian and German colonial administrations'.⁵ One of the main foundations in her arguments was the attack she made upon some of the work of the Christian missions in Africa. These were based on her own conviction that the Islamic faith of many of the African tribes she had come across was intrinsically linked to their independent lifestyles and patterns of behaviour. By attacking some of the main tenets of British Imperialism from this position in this late Victorian context, Mary Kingsley would have been an unwelcome dissenting voice. She would have been discomforting to many of her British audience also with respect to the way in which her independent travelling as a single woman in Africa would also work against the grain of the dominant ideologies about a woman's place being in the domestic sphere. This nineteenth century context is now being challenged or modified in much recent research. What John Wolffe notes as 'an increasing sensitivity to the relationships between religious life and the development and differentiation of gender roles'.⁶

was speaking', p.155.

³ John Wolffe, (ed.), Introduction to *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume V, Culture and Empire*, Manchester University Press, in association with The Open University, Manchester & New York, 1997, p.9.

⁴ Biographies of Mary Kingsley include: Mark. C. Hayford, *Mary Kingsley from an African Standpoint*, Bear and Taylor, London, 1901, Stephen Gwynn, *Life of Mary Kingsley*, London, 1932, Rudyard Kipling, *Mary Kingsley*, New York, 1932, Kathleen Wallace, *This is your Home: A Portrait of Mary Kingsley*, London, 1956, Olwen Campbell, *Mary Kingsley: A Victorian in the Jungle*, London, 1957, Cecil Howard, *Mary Kingsley*, London, 1957, Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, London, 1987. All of these have been concerned to place Mary Kingsley's life as 'extraordinary' rather than 'ordinary' within the late Victorian context of femininity and female pursuits. The fact of her travels into the 'heart' of Africa at a time when very few white English men and even fewer white women had been before continues to be the main focus of attention for biographers in the twentieth century.

⁵ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1987, p.13.

⁶ John Wolffe, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol.V, Culture & Empire*, Manchester University Press, in association with The Open University, Manchester & New York, 1997, p.10.

Brief biography

Mary Kingsley was born in 1862 to Dr. George Kingsley and May (nee Bailey) Kingsley. Her parents had married only four days before her birth and this is in many ways quite important. Her almost illegitimate birth sets up a variety of readings associated with Mary's family situation and their complexities with respect to questions of class, gender and status within late Victorian society. The significance of the circumstances of her birth was in many ways to prepare Mary Kingsley for a life of complexity, confusion and ambiguity with respect to issues of her own gender identification and the position she takes on women's issues during this period. Mary's father was a medical physician and attended to the needs and requirements of titled and privileged clients whilst Mary's mother had been his employee.⁷ So Mary was the daughter of mixed parentage in terms of class and status and this was to have profound significance to Mary Kingsley's sense of personal identity and issues of selfhood throughout her life. For, whilst Mary Kingsley's father was a doctor he actually spent much of his life travelling around the world, either accompanying his clients or alone. His lifestyle was then more of that of the leisured gentleman than a normal general practitioner. May Kingsley in the meantime, lived quite an isolated life literally, at times, confined to the home through ill health. Katherine Frank notes how for May Kingsley, marriage had been a double-edged sword. On the one hand it had given her greater status and respectability in some respects (particularly in terms of social class) and had prevented her daughter from having the label and social stigma of illegitimacy. It had also meant however on the other hand 'being trapped in a kind of social limbo...an exceedingly solitary limbo'.⁸ Not accepted into the Kingsley family network, May was also largely ignored by her own family who felt that she had married above herself. She was left to cope with her new circumstances and her largely absent husband.

May Kingsley, it can be conjectured, presented for her daughter a kind of archetypal role model of the Victorian woman at home. In order for May Kingsley to cope with her isolated existence she would, with varying degrees, swing between two different ways of being. Ways which we now recognise as stereotypical nineteenth century models of femininity which dominated women's lives during this period, especially those in the middle classes. On the one hand she would, with apparent gusto, throw herself into carrying out good works for those who needed help in the local community but when she tired of this role she would then take to her bed and 'become' sick. So, May Kingsley can be seen as fluctuating between the models of

⁷ Katherine Frank in her biography of Mary Kingsley, *A Voyager Out: The life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1987, suggests that there is evidence that May Bailey was probably George Kingsley's cook.

⁸ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1987, p.39.

femininity often referred to as 'Angel in the House' discussed in earlier chapters but also would fall into the role of the ailing heroine displayed to us through a variety of nineteenth century literary representations.

In contrast to this was the model that Mary's father presented to her. George Kingsley would return from his travels with exotic tales of adventure and these tales fed what was becoming for the young girl an insatiable curiosity for knowledge about foreign countries and foreign habits. This curiosity actually propelled Mary into a programme of self education in reading and teaching herself foreign languages. The lives of her parents then provided stark contrasts as well as in some ways exemplifying the dominant ideologies about Victorian middle class masculinity and femininity with the woman's sphere within the home whilst the father's was in the public realm. This was to have a lasting impression upon Mary Kingsley who later in life, as she embarked on her travels, employed certain writing strategies. One of which was in her use of the masculine pronoun to refer to herself. This practice is noteworthy in the ways in which it throws up for debate questions of language and self - identification. Did Mary Kingsley see herself as 'male' either through her strong identification with her father and/or because of the life that she lived as independent traveller being already constructed within the masculine realm? There are also interesting questions of the articulation of oneself in terms of gender and the anticipated reception of ones words by others. For instance, perhaps Mary Kingsley was aware of the unconventional aspects of her life and was concerned to validate her written records in the eyes of her readers through the employment of the authoritative male pronoun. This area of self-identification and representation is a highly problematic area in terms of gender and recent research by Jeffrey Richards has suggested that questions of manliness and masculinity were just as difficult to unravel during this period. In his essay, "Passing the love of women": manly love in Victorian Society', he notes that 'one of the consequences of the official doctrine of manliness with its stress on games, sexual purity and hero-worship was to prolong adolescence well into actual manhood'.⁹ His further discussion of this boy-man model of masculinity is concerned to demonstrate how, 'many of the heroes of the Empire, for example, Rhodes, Gordon and Kitchener, with their preference for hunting, exploring and warring, contained elements of the boy man'.¹⁰ Mary Kingsley's own complex identification and ownership of the masculine pronoun and her active engagement in what can be named 'boy-man' pursuits - the activities of hunting, shooting and fishing, during her travels

⁹ Jeffrey Richards, "Passing the love of women": manly love in Victorian society' in J.A. Mangan & J. Walvin, *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain & America, 1800-1940*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987, p.105.

¹⁰ F. Knight, "Male & Female He Created Them": Men, Women & the Question of Gender', in John Wolfe, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V, Culture & Empire*, Manchester University Press,

in Africa - offers a further area of research into gender roles and gender differentiation. There are many ways in which one could speculate on the impact of these identification processes upon questions of self-presentation.

As a young girl, and in fact until the death of her parents, Mary Kingsley's role was that of the dutiful daughter, firstly looking after her ailing mother and latterly for her sick father. Also, with the arrival of her brother, Mary was also in charge of his needs and requirements. This, too, was to become a constant feature of her life and she records in a letter to a friend how,

My life can be written in a very few lines... It arises from having no personal individuality of my own whatsoever. I have always lived in the lives of other people, whose work was heavy for them...It never occurs to me that I have any right to do anything more than now and then sit and warm myself at the fire of real human beings. There is not one of them who has ever cared for me apart from my services.¹¹

This commentary of total self-abnegation from Mary Kingsley's pen is very difficult to read without having an emotional response. These words appear to sum up the ways in which women in the past (and perhaps still in the present) are caught in a series of ideological traps with regard to issues of identity and self-esteem. What becomes even more astounding however, with more knowledge of Mary Kingsley's actual existence and life is just how far this representation or 'idea' of herself contrasts with her actual lived experiences and adventures, which place her in unusual and dangerous landscapes. It is also very different from the picture of her presented from other recorded perceptions and observations. This self-judgement is also important to note. It demonstrates that even though Mary Kingsley was literally to leave her home (both parental and national) behind her when she embarked on her travels to Africa, what never leaves her, is this sense of not having an identity except in her efforts to help and care for others.

Mary Kingsley's life underwent a radical transformation following the deaths of her parents and in 1893 and 1894 she took two trips to West Africa. These journeys were then recorded in her publications, *Travels in West Africa* (1897) and *West African Studies* (1899) the former of which will be discussed later in this chapter. Following these journeys Mary Kingsley was then to be regarded in England as one of the main advocates for the cause of the African and the African nation. On her return from Africa, she was invited to lecture on her experiences and later she also became instrumental in the formation of the African Society and its Journal. Mary Kingsley's final journey abroad was in 1900 when she travelled to South Africa. She went as a volunteer to serve as a nurse in attending those who have been injured

in association with The Open University, Manchester & New York, 1997, p.40.

¹¹ Mary Kingsley quoted in Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1987, p.15.

during the Boer War that had begun in 1899. Whilst it is noted by some biographers that Mary Kingsley was ambivalent and uneasy about the moral position of Britain in this dispute she was also a patriot and saw that she had a role to fulfil for her fellow citizens. Mary Kingsley was posted to Simonstown and it is from here that Mary sent the following letter,

I am down in the ruck of life again. Whether I shall come out of this...I don't know. It is a personally risky game I am playing here and it is doubtful ... All this work here, the stench, the washing, the enemas, the bed pans, the blood is my world. Not London society, politics, that gateway into which I strangely wandered into which I don't care a hairpin if I never wander again...the 'haut politique' and remember it is this haut politique that makes me have to catch large powerful family men by the tails of their night shirts at midnight, stand over them when they are sinking, tie up their jaws when they are dead. Five and six jaws a night have I had of late to tie up. *Damn the haut politique.*¹²

Mary Kingsley was however never to return to England because she contracted a fever and on June 3rd 1900 died of heart failure following an emergency operation for perforation of the bowel. Her last wish is recorded as wanting to die alone and eventually to be buried at sea. Both wishes were honoured.

Family Networks

In an attempt to place Mary Kingsley in her nineteenth century context it is also important to mention the important figure that stands out in this period to which she is related. Charles Kingsley, Mary's uncle, became a famous figure of the period in a number of ways and for a variety of reasons. He is viewed, and was seen during his own life, as an important man of letters,

whose public image was as a celebrated Victorian great man, chaplain to Queen Victoria, Canon of Westminster, Professor of History at Cambridge, Christian Socialist, champion of the working man and author of the best selling novels, *The Water Babies*, *Yeast*, *Alton Locke*, and *Westward Ho!*¹³

Charles Kingsley is also remembered with particular attention in the context of Victorian religion for his very famous public confrontation with John Henry Newman. This dispute provoked Newman's production, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, which as Katherine Frank acknowledges is now regarded as 'one of the greatest works of English autobiography',¹⁴ as

¹² This is to be the last letter that Mary Kingsley writes to her friend, Alice Green, before her own death. This extract is from Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.320. It demonstrates Mary Kingsley's own opinions on the way the British imperial adventures were going and shows an acute and sensitive, as well as highly politicised, understanding of the relationships and connections between the public policies and the private lives of those carrying these out in the field of battle.

¹³ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.28.

¹⁴ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, p.28.

well as being 'one of the most influential religious works of the nineteenth century'.¹⁵ There are many summaries of this antagonistic dispute but one of the most succinct of these, by Frances Knight, also links Charles Kingsley's strong advocacy of the ideal of Christian manliness as the foundations of this dispute alongside his rampant anti-Catholicism.¹⁶ The extent of his influence on the ideas of the young Mary Kingsley can only be conjectured. It would seem fair to suggest that these views of her uncle and the practice of her father as the adventurer and traveller provide the family backdrop for her life long practice of writing of herself as 'he' in the context of her own travels.

So, Charles Kingsley was a central figure within religious debates at this period who wielded important public influence. He was to use this influence as a member of The Eyre Defence Committee during what becomes known as the Governor Eyre Controversy in 1865.¹⁷ An outline of this provides another interesting point of family difference in which to place Mary Kingsley.

The Governor Eyre Controversy

In October 1865 in Morant Bay, Jamaica a rebellion took place of black Jamaicans against white colonial rulers. The rebellion, 'led by a peasant smallholder and local Baptist preacher called Paul Bogle, was the most serious - and most bloodily repressed - of all nineteenth century expressions of discontent in the British Caribbean'.¹⁸ The Governor of Jamaica was Edward John Eyre who quickly and brutally put down the revolt. Five hundred Jamaicans were killed, hundreds more flogged and tortured and thousands of homes burned. When news of the Revolt reached England there was great public protest and a Royal Commission was formed and subsequently sent to Jamaica to investigate conciliatory conclusions, 'Eyre was turned into a Tory hero, but the Royal Commission found that excessive punishments had been inflicted'.¹⁹ But the events did not end there because two opposing committees were formed in England. These would agitate with each other and keep the issue within the public domain: The Jamaica Committee wanted Eyre prosecuted for murder and included in its membership were: John Stuart Mill, Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin. The other committee, The Eyre Defence Committee comprised

¹⁵ Frances Knight, "Male and Female He Created Them": Men, Women and the Question of Gender", John Wolfe, (ed.) *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V., Culture & Empire*, Manchester University Press in association with The Open University, 1997, p.37.

¹⁶ Frances Knight, "Male and Female He Created Them": Men, Women and the Question of Gender", John Wolfe, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V., Culture & Empire*, Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, Manchester & New York, 1997, p. 36.

¹⁷ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, p.31.

¹⁸ Peter Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire*, Pluto Classic, Pluto Press, London, 1993, p.99.

¹⁹ Peter Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire*, Pluto Classic, Pluto Press, London, 1993, p.100.

figures such as, John Ruskin, Alfred Tennyson, Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle & Charles Kingsley. These described their opponents as 'a knot of nigger philanthropists'.²⁰ Katherine Frank takes the line that Charles Kingsley's support of Eyre 'was straightforwardly racist'²¹ and that 'despite his early Christian Socialism and support for the labouring masses, Charles had become very much a member of the establishment and a spokesman for the status quo by the 1860s.'²²

This example, which might appear initially tangential to this particular project, has a function in focusing attention on the irony of Mary Kingsley's position some years later when as the niece of Charles Kingsley she would win fame for defending the people her uncle despised, he privately calling blacks 'ant eating apes'²³ and publicly from his pulpit 'being scarcely more restrained and marvelled in one sermon that out of sticks and stones, yea out of Hottentots, could the Lord raise up worshippers'.²⁴ This was a far cry from Mary Kingsley's attempt to explain to her English audience the complexity, value and beauty of the African way of life. Her support for Africa and the Africans thus can be seen to challenge the deeply held conservative and nationalistic beliefs and values of the family to which she belonged.

Mary Kingsley's early life, until she was a mature woman of thirty, continued to be one that was insular and self-sacrificing looking after the needs of her parents and her brother. She spent what little private time she had educating her self in a number of foreign languages and studying the histories and geographies of other countries. It was not until her parents' death that she felt 'free' to take her first trip to Africa. Even then she was still concerned, as is reflected in her letters, to fit her travels around the needs, movements and requirements of her younger brother. Even after she had completed her first trip and become a prominent figure in her own right within late Victorian society, she still saw her main priority as being responsible for her brother. This internalisation of the prescriptive role of the female nurturer must have had a series of under-explored, or at least unarticulated, mental consequences. Such a life of denial of her own needs would also have been full of inherent frustrations and one of stark contrast to her travelling life and 'African' self.

²⁰ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London 1988, p.31.

²¹ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.32.

²² Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.32.

²³ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.32.

²⁴ Katherine Frank, *A Voyage Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.32.

Multiple motives for her journey to Africa

It is fascinating to look at the variety of motives that Mary Kingsley provided for her first impulse for travelling to Africa. A full discussion and evaluation of these helps to present a picture of a very complex individual who had a number of ways of thinking about her own identity and significance. It is also useful in order to extrapolate from this individual consciousness, ideas associated with norms and expectations of middle class English women during this period. One of the motives given by Mary Kingsley actually appears in her publication, *Travels in West Africa*. She states that:

It was 1893, that for the first time in my life I found myself in possession of five or six months which were not heavily forestalled, and feeling like a boy with a new half crown, I lay about in my mind, as Mr. Bunyan would say, as to what to do with them. "Go to the tropics", said Science, "Where on earth am I to go, I wondered, for tropics are tropics wherever found, so I got down an atlas and saw that either South America or West Africa must be my destination, for the Malayan region was too far off and too expensive. Then I got down Wallace's *Geographical Distribution* and after reading that master's article on the Ethiopian region, I hardened my heart and closed with West Africa."²⁵

This appears to be more than disingenuous when with further research one can begin to establish that Mary Kingsley had actually been making quite firm plans for this trip to West Africa for some ten to fifteen years prior to her departure. The self-education she had structured for herself had always had this as her ultimate goal. Mary Kingsley's explicit reference to John Bunyan here is also useful because of the way it signifies some knowledge of earlier writings about journeys of self - discovery. It provides a framework of literary analysis as well as raising a number of interesting aspects about gender and self - writing. Karen R. Lawrence in her work, *Penelope Voyages, Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, notes how, in the use of 'both the monetary figure and the cross-gendering in this self-representation place Kingsley's story within the tradition of travel as investment'.²⁶ Lawrence continues that, 'the coin metaphor is fascinating; leisure time in her "possession" is like capital just waiting to be spent. The root meanings of "adventure" are tapped metaphorically; both "venture", as in the risking of money, and "future" (l'avenir) (sic) are implicitly evoked - the thirty year old Kingsley is like a boy about to embark on his future'.²⁷ This extends further the previous arguments rehearsed earlier in this chapter with regard to Mary's sense of herself and the alliance she makes with the masculine. This analogy of Kingsley as the 'thirty year old boy' is one that Lawrence continues to foster in her argument.

²⁵ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p.1.

²⁶ Karen. R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages, Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1994,p.131.

²⁷ Karen. R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages, Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1994,p.131.

The opening passage in *Travels in West Africa* however also acts as a precursor to the way in which Mary Kingsley does actually barter her way across Africa in the same manner as the traders that she had so admired. So the motif of adventure for Kingsley can be read as having a series of effects because the adventure offered her a completely new way of being as a woman. The stories of adventure that she has read in her childhood also can be seen to contribute to the form in which she then was to represent this self.²⁸

The details of her preparations are however rather swiftly dealt with in the opening pages of *Travels in West Africa*. Nevertheless they are interesting for the tone she adopts in which to tell her tales and the especially humorous element in many of the anecdotes she supplies as well as demonstrating the range of people that she initially consults before embarking on her first journey. It is also worth pointing out here that much of the advice was negative and it was offered to try and prevent her from embarking on this dangerous pathway. Needless to say this advice was largely ignored by Mary Kingsley. For example, she notes that, 'there is a great deal of curious information' in the place of actual advice about Africa.²⁹ She further qualifies this by writing that,

I use the word curious advisedly, for I think many seemed to translate my request for practical hints and advice into an advertisement that "Rubbish may be shot here". This same information is in a state of confusion still, although I have made heroic efforts to codify it. I find, however, that it can almost all be got in under the following different headings, namely and to wit:

The dangers of West Africa.

The disagreeables of West Africa.

The diseases of West Africa.

The things you must take with you to West Africa.

The things you find most handy in West Africa.

The worst possible things you can do in West Africa.³⁰

It was actually not these individuals that Mary Kingsley was to rely upon in the preparations for her journey. One particular source was the pamphlet publication, '*Hints to Travellers*', by one Mr. J. Coles who was an instructor in surveying.³¹ This publication contained information on a whole range of topics from equipment to take, health care and

²⁸ Katherine Frank in *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, notes how one of Mary's favourite books was Daniel Defoe's *A General History of Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*, and Karen R. Lawrence in *Penelope Voyages, Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, points out in her footnote 20 that, 'This book about pirates ...contains the narratives of *'the Remarkable Actions and Adventures of the Two Female Pirates, Mary Read and Anny Bonny'* and she suggests that 'these narratives, which record the odd Incidents of their rambling Lives' might have provided Kingsley's imagination with a particularly interesting adaptation of a masculine model'.

²⁹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p.2.

³⁰ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, 1982, London, p.2.

³¹ See the Preface to the Eleventh Edition of *Hints to Travellers Volume 1, Survey and Field Astronomy*, edited by E.A.Reeves(with the help of many travellers), Instructor in Survey for the Royal Geographical Society, 1901-33, The Royal Geographical Society, London, 1935.

prevention to geographical mapping and field astronomy. The contents of this pamphlet bears testimony to the detailed preparation Mary Kingsley was actually to undertake rather than the suggestion from her own words that one day she just decided to go to Africa. This is highly significant in that one of the prime reasons for her journey was actually to collect specimens of unusual interest from Africa for the National History Museum but her casual understatements about her preparations work almost to deny the serious and scientific basis of her travels. Why is this? It could be asserted that the realms of science have been positioned as those domains of the male but this surely would have only added to Mary Kingsley's employment of the masculine pronoun and model for her own ends. Perhaps it is a perception that collecting and science is not as adventurous or exciting (or perhaps enticing) to the reader? But this does not seem feasible in the post Darwinian age in which she was to embark and the aftermath of interest in natural science and collection.

Karen R. Lawrence argues that Mary Kingsley's opening persona has more to do with Kingsley's concern to reinterpret herself in terms of gender and of nationality. She suggests that,

Yet her adaptation of this jaunty, "masculine" tone submerges an exhausted past that has been differently shaped by gender - that of a Victorian spinster who selflessly nursed her parents and suddenly found herself alone when her parents died...Kingsley begins her narrative with her departure from England because England cannot support her story.³²

So, just as one of the previous descriptions of herself as someone who will 'sit and warm' herself 'at the fires of real human beings'³³ so these opening pages of her book which work to decentre Mary Kingsley. If the first is the essence of emptiness and self - abnegation (the female), the second is the impulsive explorer (the male). England becomes then the site of emptiness whilst Africa represents the exciting, the exotic. The latter is the familiar position given to Africa by male writers and travellers of the period and it would seem appropriate that Mary Kingsley adopts this along with other devices. However what becomes a further issue for consideration is the different placing of the exotic when the person involved is actually female and not male. A later fictional writer, Joseph Conrad was to claim Africa as a 'heart of darkness' whilst the psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud was to claim that female sexuality is a 'dark continent'. With Mary Kingsley's narrative these two elements of Africa and sexuality appear to become conflated. For Africa rather than England provided her with a landscape of self.

One anecdote worthy of comment is also provided in these opening pages as an

³² Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyage, Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1994, p.132.

³³ Full quotation appears earlier in this chapter.

example of the humour provided by Mary Kingsley's style of recounting her early organisational matters. It is also important for the light it throws on the particular religious context of the African continent during this period. Mary Kingsley records how she had gone to seek the advice of an acquaintance of hers who had lived on the African coast for seven years

Although, not, it is true, on that part of it which I was bound for. Still his advice was pre-eminently worth attention, because, in spite of his long residence in the deadliest spot in the region, he was still in fair going order. I told him I intended going to West Africa, and he said, "When you have made up your mind to go to West Africa the very best thing you can do is to get it unmade again and go to Scotland instead; but if your intelligence is not strong enough to do so, abstain from exposing yourself to the direct rays of the sun, take 4 grains of quinine every day for a fortnight before you reach the Rivers, and get some introductions to the Wesleyans; they are the only people on the Coast who have a hearse with feathers."³⁴

In many ways this illustration can be left to speak for itself but there are one or two points which are worth noting which were to have significance after Mary Kingsley has lived and travelled in Africa. The advice about taking quinine was adhered to throughout her journey and this must have successfully prevented her from contracting any illness, especially malaria. However, more important is the comment about Wesleyan missionaries for another part of her preparation was to consult with them and the records of their work. The impression gained before the journey was to have full resonance in her later encounters with missionaries and the position she was to take on their work in Africa. Mary Kingsley was very disappointed in the literature of the missionaries. She records,

So to missionary literature I addressed myself with great ardour; alas! only to find that these good people wrote their reports not to tell you how the country they resided in was, but how it was getting on towards being what it ought to be, and how necessary it was that their readers should subscribe more freely, and not get any foolishness into their heads about obtaining an adequate supply of souls for their money.³⁵

Later in this same passage, she does acknowledge, somewhat ironically, that, 'from the missionaries it was, however, that I got my first idea about the social condition of West Africa. I gathered that there existed there, firstly the native human beings - the raw material, as it were - and that these were led either to good or bad respectively by the missionary and the trader'.³⁶

The setting up of this opposition between the missionaries and the traders was to become highly significant, as well as a highly charged space for intervention on Mary Kingsley's part. It is important however at this point to look also at the positive support given to Mary Kingsley from the Wesleyan missionaries on her arrival in Africa and her own

³⁴ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p.4.

³⁵ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p.3.

gratitude for their help and the introductions for her that their network provided. During her time on the Gold Coast and Accra she was particularly effusive. This effusiveness is recorded within the brief summary of the work of the Wesleyans that Kingsley writes in *Travels in West Africa*. Mary Kingsley documents the work of the Mission House under the guidance of Mr Dennis Kemp and notes that,

This is the largest and most influential Protestant Mission on the Gold Coast of West Africa, and it is now, I am glad to say, adding a technical department to its scholastic and religious one. The Basel Mission has done a great deal of good work in giving technical instruction to the natives, and practically started this most important branch of their education. There is still an almost infinite amount of this work to be done, the African being so strangely deficient in mechanical culture; infinitely more so, indeed, in this than in any other particular. All the other Protestant missions are following the Basel Mission's lead, and, recognising that a good deal of their failures arises from a want of this practical side in their instruction, are now starting technical schools: the Church of England in Sierre Leone, the Wesleyans on the Gold Coast, and the Presbyterians in Calabar.³⁷

It is interesting to note Mary Kingsley's praise for the work of the Wesleyan Mission in this particular instance because of their extended programme of education and skills for the African people. Also, that this passage works as a prolepsis for her later meeting in Calabar with the important Presbyterian missionary, Mary Slessor. The latter's work and personal commitment to the peoples of Africa was to have a lasting impact upon Mary Kingsley. However, having praised the Wesleyans for provision of technical support and instruction, Mary Kingsley then follows this with further and perhaps slightly more critical comments,

In some of these technical schools the sort of instruction given is, to my way of thinking, ill-advised; arts of no immediate or great use in the present culture-condition of West Africa - such as printing, book-binding, and tailoring - being taught. But this is not the case under the Wesleyans, who also teach smith's work, carpentry, bricklaying, wagon-building, etc.³⁸

She follows this criticism with a more scathing comparison with the work being carried out solely in the missions run by the Roman Catholics, 'Alas! none of the missions save the Roman Catholic teach the thing that is most important the natives should learn, in the face of the conditions that European government of the Coast has induced, namely, improved methods of agriculture, and plantation work.'³⁹

Notwithstanding this critical edge to Mary Kingsley's commentary there are also a series of useful facts and figures as to the economic and numerical strength of this particular mission at this time in Africa.⁴⁰ For instance she notes that on the Gold Coast in 1893 this

³⁶ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p.3.

³⁷ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p.28.

³⁸ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p.28/9

³⁹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p.29.

⁴⁰ Mary Kingsley records here that, 'The Wesleyan Mission has only four white ministers here. Native ministers there are seventeen, and the rest of the staff is entirely native, consisting of 70

particular mission raised £5,338 14s. 9d. This was an incredible amount of money and she sees this success as the direct influence and involvement of the native members of the Wesleyan Mission, 'for almost all the other native Christian bodies are content to be in a state of pauperized dependency on British subscriptions.'⁴¹

A further motive for her travels was to emerge and be recorded later in life. At the time when she had become a famous public figure, she changes her motives to demonstrate that her travels were actually 'acts of filial piety.'⁴² She claims,

My motive for going to West Africa was study; this study was that of native ideas and practices in religion and law. My reason for taking up this study was a desire to complete a great book my father George Kingsley left unfinished...So I, knowing how much my father wished that book finished, went out after his death to West Africa. It was no desire to get killed or eaten that made me go and associate with tribes with the worst reputation for cannibalism and human sacrifice, but just because such tribes were the best for me to study.⁴³

This is an interesting public motive for Mary Kingsley to project because it provides a continuum of the image or self-identification she had subjected herself to during her early girlhood. So, the public persona of the 'dutiful daughter' outlived and outlasted the identification of herself through her experience of solitary travel and acclaim as a relatively famous figure in her own right.⁴⁴ This may be further support to her having a very pragmatic strategy of self-representation. Mary Kingsley's exploits in Africa (as a single unaccompanied woman) and particularly her very vocal defence of African life may have caused great offence, not only in relation to moral values with regard to sexual propriety but also within the late nineteenth century English imperial context. To evoke 'duty' as a reason for these exploits was perhaps more acceptable and less contentious than personal desire, ambition and fulfilment. The denials of these within this later rationalisation, might for Mary Kingsley, have acted as a reassertion of herself as a 'normal' or ordinary late Victorian woman.

Another motive is disclosed later by Mary Kingsley for her chosen direction. It is contained within a personal letter to a close friend and exhibits a very tragic self-presentation, Dead tired and feeling that no one had need for me anymore when my mother and father died within six weeks of each other in 1892, and my brother went off to the East, I went down to

Catechists, 144 schoolteachers, 386 Sunday-school teachers, and 405 local preachers. The total number of fully accredited members of this sect in 1893 was stated in the *Gold Coast Annual* to be 7,066.', *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p. 29.

⁴¹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago, London, 1982, p. 29.

⁴² Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: the Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, p.78.

⁴³ This statement comes from one of Mary Kingsley's lectures quoted in Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, p.78.

⁴⁴ Mary's father George Kingsley had never actually got round to writing up his book on his travels or anthropological observations. He did leave, after his death, numerous papers and materials which Mary Kingsley collates and publishes as *Notes on Sport and Travel*, by George Kingsley with a memoir by his daughter Mary Kingsley, with Macmillan, London, in 1900.

Africa to die. West Africa amazed me and was kind to me and scientifically interesting and did not want to kill me just then - I am in no hurry. I don't care one way or the other for a year or so.⁴⁵

This death wish motive seems quite extraordinary to take on board. It appears to contradict the representations of her two separate journeys to Africa, where it is evident that Mary Kingsley's health and well-being were far better in West Africa where she lives an active and mobile life, to the times that she spent in England where passivity may have been the direct cause of ill health for her. It may be a case of her having to repress her own desire and appear to be the grieving daughter in accordance with nineteenth century expectations.

Travels in West Africa, Congo Francais, Corisco and Cameroons, 1897

In search of fish and fetish

Having looked at the various motives that Mary Kingsley, at different times of her life, claimed as the impetus for her journeys to West Africa, it becomes clear that she had several objectives as her main tasks prior to her travels. These become further extended when she was actually in Africa and part of the different culture and climate. It is worth noting in the context of this particular study that in these many different positions offered there is never any hint of any religious motivation - either explicit or implicit. These only become apparent as one reads her narrative in *Travels in West Africa*. Whilst the collection of rare species of fish was part of the reasoning for her travels, one of her main projects or tasks was to study tribes within Africa with respect to their customs and practices, what she herself refers to as 'fetish'. This was endorsed by James.W. Fernandez who has suggested that,

whilst the primary rationale of Mary Kingsley's expedition was the collection and preservation of new species of fish, she often extended the taxonomy metaphor to the African people and African life; he and it were of a different species and entitled to description and preservation.⁴⁶

It is with regard to this aspect that Mary Kingsley's work seems to have been largely under explored in relation to the religious connotations for the period in which she was working. There are a number of different definitions for the term 'fetish' and the origin of the word itself is stated as referring to 'any object used by the Negroes of the Guinea coast and neighbourhood as an amulet or means of enchantment'.⁴⁷ To many of Mary Kingsley's nineteenth century contemporaries the word itself would probably have invoked a common reference or understanding of the inanimate objects used by savages and the belief by them that these had

⁴⁵ Mary Kingsley letter to a friend in Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, p.78/9.

⁴⁶ James W Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1982, p.60. This appears within an explanatory footnote number 57.

⁴⁷ This definition from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, p.692.

magical or supernatural powers. What is worthy of note is the fact of how the study of fetish and fetishism has become the central territory in anthropological study of and within other cultures. James W. Fernandez suggests that Mary Kingsley 'in two principal works (by this he refers one assumes to *Travels in West Africa, Congo Francais, Corsico and Cameroons* (1897) and *West African Studies*(1899)), devoted more attention to the discussion of fetishism and African spirituality than to any other subject, including politics and economics in which she was also strongly interested.'⁴⁸ He also comments that, 'She took her research seriously enough to consult directly with the great English anthropologist, Sir Edward Tylor, about her facts and theories. From him she obtained the culture concept, though she disrupted his dream theory of religion.'⁴⁹ It will be claimed later in this chapter that the kinds of observation and deductions that Mary Kingsley was engaged within were based not on the perception of Africans with respect to their 'otherness' or savagery. It was to become a sustained analysis of the ways in which the everyday social practices and customs of many of the tribes that she was with were actually the material representation or manifestations of the observance of their religion. A religion, which was in Mary Kingsley's view to have similarities with those practices and observances, held within the Islamic tradition.

The study of fetishism has other nineteenth century roots within the work of Professor Friedrich Max Muller who, 'has been ranked alongside great Victorians such as John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley and Matthew Arnold as one of the 'father-figures of the Victorian fireside'.⁵⁰ Muller was born in Germany and had studied in Leipzig and Berlin. His areas of study included a doctorate on the philosophy of Spinoza as well as linguistic studies in Hebrew, Arabic and Sanskrit. In Berlin he studied under the idealist philosopher, Friedrich Schelling.⁵¹ These studies formed the basis of his lifelong interest in Indian culture in particular as well as the general area of the relationship between language, religion and mythology. Muller journeyed to England in 1846 and became a Professor at Oxford University in 1854 where he

⁴⁸ James W. Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1982., p.38.

⁴⁹ James. W. Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa*, Princeton University Press, 1982.,p.39. Also instructive within this context is the extensive footnote that is provided of detailed correspondence between Mary Kingsley and other important figures of the period, for example, Dr. Nassau.

⁵⁰ G.W.Trompf, 'Friedrich Max Muller: some preliminary chips from his German workshop', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol.5, pp.200-217, p. 200 quoted by G. Beckerlegge, 'Professor Friedrich Max Muller and the Missionary Cause' in John Wolffe, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain Vol. V, Culture and Empire*, Manchester University Press in association with The Open University, Manchester & New York, 1997, p.179.

⁵¹ These biographical details are indebted to G. Beckerlegge's chapter, 'Professor Friedrich Max Muller and the Missionary Cause' in John Wolffe,(ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V., Culture and Empire*, Manchester University Press in association with The Open University, Manchester and New York, 1997, pps.177-221.

stayed until his death in 1900. The details of his work in relation to Indian Culture can be found elsewhere⁵² but with respect to this study there are two particular aspects of Muller's life and work which can be seen as relevant. Firstly, that Friedrich Max Muller was related by marriage (if but distantly) to Mary Kingsley. Secondly, that either because of this relationship or because of the highly controversial nature and public interest in much of Muller's works his ideas on religion and mythology would have been known to Mary Kingsley and have had some influence.⁵³ It is to Muller that Victorian interest in 'fetishism' has often been attributed. Through his work on the comparative study of religion and mythology he was accredited as a scholar who opened up 'the minds of the educated public to the varied forms that religion may take and thus the importance of the new discipline of the comparative study of religions'.⁵⁴ Mary Kingsley's work and her concern to make known the lives, habits and customs of the Africans can in some ways be seen as mimetic of the work of Muller bearing in mind the ethnographic difference of her approach. Just as he was concerned to open up minds to the worth and value of other religions from other cultures, so was Kingsley. However, their views differed profoundly with Mary Kingsley having no reservations in asserting the African way as separate and valuable for its own sake. She differed from many late Victorians who were concerned to hold on to the supremacy of the Christian way as the only 'civilising' route alongside a supposedly more tolerant attitude to other religions.

So, rather than Mary Kingsley's work being seen as tangential one can begin to claim that she began to provide new ways of looking at both religious belief and practices in Africa during this time. It can also be claimed that her work extended a new cartography to ethnography of which Mary Kingsley can be claimed as an early practitioner.⁵⁵ Judith Okely and Helen Callaway have also suggested that the area of autobiography has been 'left out' of much of the work carried out in relation to anthropological studies. They are concerned to

⁵² In particular, Friedrich Max Muller, *India: What Can It Teach Us?* Longmans, London, 1883.

⁵³ Gwilym Beckerlegge notes that, 'After a lengthy struggle to convince his future wife's family of the soundness of both his financial prospects and his Christian beliefs, Muller married Georgina Grenfell at Bray Church in Berkshire in 1859. He thus became connected by marriage to Charles Kingsley and J.A. Froude.', 'Professor Friedrich Max Muller and the Missionary Cause' in John Wolffe, (ed.) *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V., Culture and Empire*, Manchester University Press, in association with The Open University, Manchester and New York, 1997, p.182.

⁵⁴ G. Beckerlegge, 'Professor Friedrich Max Muller and the Missionary Cause' in John Wolffe, (ed.) *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V., Culture and Empire*, Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1997, p.185.

⁵⁵ James. W. Fernandez in his work, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1982, notes how Mary Kingsley's work and observations recorded in *Travels in West Africa* is owed a great debt particularly with respect to 'something she called 'The African Idea' whose study was, she tells us in the enthusiasm of describing it, her chief motive for going to Africa'.(p.38.) I am indebted for his direction to the point in *Travels in West Africa* where Mary Kingsley writes, 'Stalking the wild West Africa idea is one of the most charming pursuits in the world.', *Travels in West Africa*, p.429-430.

suggest that within the area of

Social anthropology, more than any other discipline in the humanities and the social sciences, has developed the practice of intensive fieldwork by a single individual, sometimes in collaboration with a spouse. The implications of this unique experience have not been fully theorized. Yet the 'race', nationality, gender, age, and personal history of the fieldworker affect the process, interaction and emergent material.⁵⁶

Whilst they are writing in relation to twentieth century practices within anthropological research and analysis it is worth noting how the recommendations for this involvement can also be taken back to re-visit earlier work, such as Mary Kingsley's, in the area.⁵⁷ They continue to suggest some of the limitations of studies in this field currently whereby 'autobiographical accounts have been split off into novels, secreted under pseudonyms or in diaries. Alternatively, accounts appear as imagined heroism or are popularised as comic yarns for a readership indifferent to ethnography'.⁵⁸ This can be seen as highly applicable to the fate and placing of the work of Mary Kingsley. Her writings are now marketed in relation to her 'heroism' as a late Victorian woman traveller and the actual substance of her work on fetish and culture is largely ignored.⁵⁹

Mary Kingsley herself is aware of the different values placed on different forms of writing and provides a rationale for the ways in which she has worked to structure her book *Travels in West Africa*. Chapter VI begins with an explanatory note:

I must pause here to explain my reasons for giving extracts from my diary, being informed on excellent authority that publishing a diary is a form of literary crime. Such being the case I have to urge in extenuation of my committing it that - Firstly, I have not done it before, for so far I have given a sketchy resume of many diaries kept by me while visiting the regions I have attempted to describe. Secondly, no one expects literature in a book of travel. Thirdly, there are things to be said in favour of the diary form, particularly when it is kept in a little known and wild region, for the reader gets therein notice of things that, although unimportant in themselves, yet go to make up the conditions of life under which men and things exist. The

⁵⁶ Judith Okely & Helen Callaway, (eds.), *Anthropology and Autobiography, ASA Monographs 29.*, Routledge, London, 1992, Preface.

⁵⁷ The work of the American critic and poet, Adrienne Rich, has been particularly instructive here with her concept of 're-vision'. 'Re-vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new cultural history...' from her essay, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets & Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, Virago Press, London, 1980, 1984 reprint, p. 35.

⁵⁸ Judith Okely & Helen Callaway, (eds.), *Anthropology and Autobiography, ASA Monographs, 29*, Routledge, London, 1992, Preface.

⁵⁹ Even the Virago edition of Mary Kingsley's, *Travels in West Africa*, Virago Press, London, 1982 which is "reproduced from the unabridged 1897 Macmillan edition" carried marketing material which place the text as 'Travel-Literature'. A similar fate befalls Mary Kingsley on the section of her work included in, Mary Morris (ed.) with Larry O'Connor, *The Virago Book of Women Travellers*, Virago Press, London, 1994, which is concerned to set Mary Kingsley up in relation to the 'comic' nature of her encounters rather than the very serious contribution she had to make to the English understanding of African life. This is subsumed into two lines of commentary, 'The next year she went to West Africa for six months. She returned in 1894 and stayed a year, working as a trader and gathering fish and fetishes', p. 57.

worst of it is these things are not often presented in their due and proper proportion in diaries. Many pages of my journals that I will spare you display this crime to perfection. For example: 'Awful turn up with crocodile about ten - Paraffin good for over-oiled boots - Evil spirits crawl on ground, hence high lintel - Odeaka cheese is made thus:-' Then comes half a yard on Odeaka cheese making.⁶⁰

Having said this anyone who now reads *Travels in West Africa* can also see that Mary Kingsley had only limited success in keeping any clear sense of structure and organisation in her writing. It becomes apparent to the reader that she cannot stop herself from providing personal asides and commentaries to the main narrative, presumably from these said diaries and journals. Many of these asides are extremely humorous as, for example, in Chapter IX, where she is supposedly concerned to describe her journey through the rapids of the Ogowe and the help she has from an Igalwa interpreter. She cannot maintain the descriptive narrative flow without putting in an aside on how she was perceived as an oddity through not having a husband to accompany her. She notes, 'and as for the husband, neither the Royal Geographical Society's list, in their 'Hints for Travellers', nor Messrs. Silver, in their elaborate lists of articles necessary for a traveller in tropical climates, make mention of husbands'.⁶¹ She does however also provide her own justification for this lack of chronological narrative style as she claims,

When a person is out travelling, intent mainly on geography, it is necessary, if he publishes his journals, that he should publish them in sequence. But I am not a geographer. I have to learn the geography of a region I go into in great detail, so as to get about; but my means of learning it are not the scientific ones - Taking observations, Surveying, Fixing points, etc., etc. These things I know not how to do. I do not 'take lunars'; and I always sympathise with a young friend of mine, who, on hearing that an official had got dreadfully ill from taking them, said, 'What do these government men do it for? It kills them all off. I don't hold with knocking yourself to pieces with a lot of doctor's stuff.'⁶²

This section finishes with Mary Kingsley's comment that, 'This being my point of view regarding geography, I have relegated it to a separate chapter and have dealt similarly with trade and fetish.'⁶³ This assertion, whilst partly correct as there are some separate chapters on geography, trade and fetish, is also continually undermined or challenged by the mixing of topics and issues as her narrative progresses. It is however also in this section of the *Travels in West Africa* that we learn for the first time that she has kept what she calls her 'bush journal'. This she says is her, 'journal of researches in Fetish and of life in the forest and in native villages,'⁶⁴ and that she has omitted this altogether in this present work. Again, this

⁶⁰ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.100.

⁶¹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.167.

⁶² Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.101.

⁶³ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.101.

⁶⁴ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.101.

claim is only partially true because *Travels in West Africa* is littered with her episodic narratives of the different peoples and places, their customs and habits that she comes across on her travels through Africa.

In the later chapters in *Travels in West Africa*, on the subject of fetish Mary Kingsley demonstrates a highly researched and informed approach to her studies in this area. It becomes apparent that she has spent a great deal of her adult life educating herself in the study of other cultures and the study of fetish in particular. She states how she 'went out (to Africa) with my mind full of the deductions of every book on Ethnology, German or English, that I had read during fifteen years.'⁶⁵ She provides some examples of the reading she has undertaken by way of pointing out the limitations of these texts with regard to having any real understanding of the West African situation when it is experienced first hand. She claims later in this chapter that, The fascination of the African point of view is as sure to linger in your mind as the malaria will linger in your body. Never then will you be able to attain to the gay, happy cock-sureness regarding the Deity and the Universe of those people who stay at home, and to whom the *Saturday* so aptly called 'the suburban agnostics'. You will always feel inclined to ask this class of people, 'Yes; well, what is the Force? What is Motion; and above all, tell me what is Matter that you talk so glibly of? and if so why?' And the suburban agnostic looks down on you, and says pityingly, 'Read Schopenhauer and Clifford', as if he were ordering pills; which revolts you, and you retort 'Read Kant and Darwin,' and the conversation disappears into a fog of words.⁶⁶

What Mary Kingsley appears to be suggesting here is that the surety of the European mind, irrespective of the point of view and the approach taken, is immediately undermined by the African point of the view and the connections between mind and lived experience.

Katherine Frank in her biography of Mary Kingsley claims that the way in which fetish is being portrayed by Mary Kingsley both within *Travels in West Africa* and the later *West African Studies* 'comes close to being spiritual autobiography'.⁶⁷ The reasons for this are the impassioned ways in which Mary Kingsley provided the detail of customs and practices of the African tribes she encountered. She maintained the central importance of 'the way in which fetish kept alive and vital and ever present fundamental spiritual and philosophical problems and beliefs.'⁶⁸ For in her portrayals,

Fetish was not something one practised one day out of seven or five times a day while kneeling eastward. It affected the most mundane of daily chores and told one whence one came, where one was bound, and the meaning of existence in between these two points. And this all-encompassing power it possessed derived from the way in which it sprang from the empirical

⁶⁵ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984,p.435.

⁶⁶ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p. 441.

⁶⁷ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988,p.207.

⁶⁸ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988,p.207.

evidence of nature - it was, in fact, a species of pantheism.⁶⁹

For Mary Kingsley then the study of fetish has particular methods and objectives. Her prime concern is with the comparative study of those African tribes who have had some contact with and been influenced by European culture and those that have not. The latter is of more importance and interest to her and she claims that the study of 'the African form of thought and the difficulties of studying it (i.e. the form untouched by other influences), is my main motive for going to West Africa'.⁷⁰ She outlines how,

Since 1893 I have been collecting information in its native state regarding Fetish, and I use the usual terms fetish and ju-ju because they have among us a certain fixed value - a conventional value, but a useful one. Neither "fetish" nor "ju-ju" are native words. Fetish comes from the word the old Portuguese explorers used to designate the objects they thought the natives worshipped, and in which they were wise enough to recognise a certain similarity to their own little images and relics of Saints, "*Feitico*". Ju-ju, on the other hand, is French, and comes from the word for a toy or a doll, so it is not so applicable as the Portuguese name, for the native image is not a doll or toy, and has far more affinity to the image of a saint, inasmuch as it is not venerated for itself, or treasured because of its prettiness, but only because it is the residence, or the occasional haunt, of a spirit.⁷¹

A further task that Mary Kingsley had on her travels was to endeavour to find new species of fish in the tropical climate of Africa and to bring these back to the rare specimens section of the British Museum. This task was on the advice of one of her associates, Dr. Gunter who was the keeper of this section of the Museum. Whilst *Travels in West Africa* is about this main aim of the trip⁷² it can also be read, and hence its inclusion in this study, as many other things. *Travels in West Africa* can be evaluated as a travel log, a diary, a series of episodic adventures, a collection of personal anecdotes and incidents all spun in a familiar narrative construction which, by invoking previous criteria discussed in the introductory chapters, can be read as quasi-autobiography. So, *Travels in West Africa* can be read as a process of becoming for Mary Kingsley in particular with respect to the way in which in writing down her experiences and her observations on her travels she is also writing about a different experience of herself as a woman. So as well as identifying new fish and new fetish practices Mary Kingsley is also writing a new version of her self. For while the other women in this study have been empowered to write in the first place through their religious faith Mary Kingsley becomes empowered through the act of travelling and observing. This more proactive journey into selfhood is also one which becomes infected with new ideas about religion and

⁶⁹ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London 1988, p.206.

⁷⁰ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.429

⁷¹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p. 429.

⁷² Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.12, "I was out for

belief held in West Africa and are ideas which are to affect Mary Kingsley quite profoundly.

West Africa and Islam

One of the first things that strikes the reader on beginning Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* is the frequent evocations to Allah throughout. This appears from the very introductory chapter where she is acknowledging the people who have helped her - both in the preparation for the journey and upon the voyage itself.⁷³ Whilst this alone would probably be insufficient evidence to support her conversion to Islam it is however an early indication that the world that Mary Kingsley is concerned to construct within this narrative is one which is giving authority to the signifier of a tradition other than the English or Christian God. This influence on Mary Kingsley can be seen to be a gradual one and is based upon her close experience and encounters with people who are different from the Christian people she has grown up with and who she comes across in the missions on her travels. Whether it is the religion per se that Mary Kingsley subscribes to or the seduction of the African way of life is more difficult to state.

Mary Kingsley can be described as seduced by the 'otherness' of the native peoples of Africa as the language and tone of her descriptions bears testimony. She provides the following depiction of the crowded streets of Freetown,

In among these crowds of country people walk stately Mohammedans, Mandingoes, Akers, and Fulahs of the Arabised tribes of the West Sudan. These are lithe well-made men, and walk with a peculiarly fine, elastic carriage. Their graceful garb consists of a white loose-sleeved shirt, over which they wear either a long black mohair or silk gown, or a deep bright blue affair, not altogether unlike a University gown, only with more stuff in it and more folds. They are undoubtedly the gentlemen of the Sierra Leone native population, and they are becoming an increasing faction in the town, by no means to the pleasure of the Christians.⁷⁴

Although in this section Mary Kingsley has positioned herself as an outsider/ observer, not giving any sense of allegiance to one grouping or another the passage continues to provide further evidence of where her admiration falls. She continues,

For although Bishop Ingram admits that they are always ready to side with the missionaries against the drink traffic, here their co-operation ceases, and he complains that they exercise a great influence over the native Christian flock. He says, "We are disposed to believe that the words of their Koran are only a fetish and a charm to the rank and file of their adherents, and that great superstition prevails among them, and it is propagated by them," but how the Bishop can see a difference in this matter between the use of the Koran and the Bible by the Negro of Sierra Leone, it is difficult to understand; and judged by the criterion of every-day conduct, the

freshwater fish from a river north of the Congo this time..."

⁷³ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1982, p.7 in a section where Mary Kingsley is thanking the 'Agent' for his help she also notes how things that cannot be found, 'Allah only knows where'.

⁷⁴ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p. 17.

Mohammedan is in nine cases in ten, the best man in West Africa.⁷⁵

Mary Kingsley then provides the reader with further enlightenment that she has discovered about the differences between certain groups of Mohammedans, 'They are, moreover, by no means strict teetotallers, and some individuals from Accra, whom I once met, shocked me deeply by saying Mohammedans were divided into two classes, Marabuts who do not drink, and Sonniki, who do'.⁷⁶ These extracts are important on a number of levels because of the way they not only provide a picture of difference in Africa at this time but also the way in which knowledge about this difference was still being formed. These differences which Mary Kingsley is highlighting in the late nineteenth century have left a legacy for the late twentieth century where, 'Islam is a world-wide religion embracing many cultures and nations, comprising today nearly 900 million persons'.⁷⁷ However despite the different formations and variations both then and now, all Muslims 'believe that God (Allah) revealed to the Prophet Mohammad guidance for the proper conduct in this world and salvation in the next and that these revelations are contained in the Muslim's scripture, the Qur'an'.⁷⁸ Mary Kingsley's comments and in particular her awareness of differences across various groups are highly significant here. They demonstrate her knowledge about the Islamic traditions and the challenges these present to the position of some writers on Victorian religion who suggest that, 'the religious diversity that Victorians knew, however, was almost exclusively the 'internal pluralism' within institutionalized British Christianity.'⁷⁹ Further that 'many Victorians would have been puzzled by references to 'other religions' within the context of British society apart from the presence of Judaism'.⁸⁰ But here the difference of emphasis is that Mary Kingsley is working outside the British context and studying the Islamic faith in the field so to speak.

The assumption made about the lack of knowledge of other religions here though does work to gloss over the continued and persistent intellectual tradition of scholarship into 'other

⁷⁵ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.18. Here, Mary Kingsley also provides a footnote to the quotation from Bishop Ingram from the book, *Sierre Leone after a Hundred Years*.

⁷⁶ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.18.

⁷⁷ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, opening abstract.

⁷⁸ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, Introduction.

⁷⁹ G.Beckerlegge, 'Followers of 'Mohammed, Kalee and Dada Nanuk': The Presence of Islam and South Asian Religions in Victorian Britain', in John Wolffe (Ed.) *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V., Culture and Empire*, Manchester University Press in association with The Open University, Manchester & New York, 1997,p.222.

⁸⁰ G. Beckerlegge, 'Followers of 'Mohammed, Kalee and Dada Nanuk': The Presence of Islam and South Asian Religions in Victorian Britain', in John Wolffe (Ed.) *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V., Culture and Empire*, Manchester University Press, in association with The Open University, Manchester & New York, 1997,p.223.

religions' and the Victorian age as one of enormous curiosity into these faiths. This has already been highlighted in previous chapters of this study with the writings of Grace Aguilar, Harriet Martineau and George Eliot. One of the key figures to write about and introduce Mahomet and Islam to an English audience was Thomas Carlyle. His work on this was originally delivered as a series of lectures in the 1840's and these form part of his thesis on *Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*.⁸¹ In his opening lecture on *The Hero as Divinity*, Carlyle claims that he is concerned to look at 'Six classes of Heroes, chosen out of widely-distant countries and epochs, and in mere external figure differing altogether...'⁸² and part of his thesis is to assert the similarities across the globe of religion at different times, working as a symbol of men's feelings and knowledge with respect to the Universe and the consequent need by most to 'worship a hero as transcendent admiration of a Great Man'.⁸³ It is in his second lecture that he introduces *The Hero as Prophet: Mahomet: Islam*. A lecture which he delivered on Friday 8th May in 1840. It begins, 'The Hero is not now regarded as a God among his fellowmen; but as one God-inspired, as a prophet. It is the second phase of hero-worship.'⁸⁴ For this second phase Carlyle has chosen 'Mahomet not as the most eminent prophet, but as the one we are the freest to speak of. He is by no means the truest of Prophets; but I do esteem him a true one. Farther as there is no danger of our becoming, any of us, Mahometans, I mean to say all the good of him I can...'⁸⁵

This opening passage has a number of important factors in relation to this study on Mary Kingsley. Whilst there is no concrete proof that she had read this particular essay of Carlyle's it is fair to assume that his early works on the Islamic faith would have been at least familiar to her either in this original form or through the later works of others. It is also important because of the assumption being made in 1840 that only those born into the Islamic faith could or would be believers, something which Mary Kingsley in the later part of the century appeared to challenge. Carlyle's lecture is also testimony to the ways in which questions of religion and belief are also positioned within cultural hierarchies, oppositions and mythologies. He maintains that,

Our current hypothesis about Mahomet, that he was a scheming Imposter, a Falsehood incarnate, that his religion is a mere mass of quackery and fatuity, begins really to be now

⁸¹ The collection used here being Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus, On Heroes, Hero Worship*, Dent & Sons, London, 1948.

⁸² Thomas Carlyle, '*On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*', Dent & Sons, London, 1948, p.240.

⁸³ Thomas Carlyle, '*On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*', Dent & Sons, London, 1948, p.248.

⁸⁴ Thomas Carlyle, '*On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*', Dent & Sons, London, 1948, p.277.

⁸⁵ Thomas Carlyle, '*On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*', Dent & Sons, London, 1948, p.278/9.

untenable to anyone. The word this man spoke has been the life-guidance now of a hundred and eighty millions of men these twelve hundred years. These hundred and eighty millions were made by God as well as we. A greater number of God's creatures believe in Mahomet's word at this hour than in any other word whatever...⁸⁶

Famous for his oratorical style Carlyle, in this lecture, provides a wonderfully strange description of the Arab landscape and the Arab peoples in order to further illustrate his thoughts,

Such a country is fit for the swift-handed, deep-hearted race of men. There is something most agile, active and yet most meditative, enthusiastic in the Arab character. The Persians are called the French of the east, we will call the Arabs Oriental Italians. A gifted noble people; a people of wild strong feelings, and of iron restraint over these; the characteristic noblemindness, of genius.⁸⁷

Whilst this description of otherness through comparison, 'Persians as the French of the East' and 'Arabs as Oriental Italians' reads in part today as bizarre ethnic stereotyping it is also important in highlighting nineteenth century ways in which differences are articulated in a language of association. These were constructed within a language which produces images of activity, strength and nobleness. All of which are written into Mary Kingsley's descriptions of the Africans and their beliefs as she observed them on her travels. Carlyle is only concerned with the geographic Arab world of worship but in his observation of what he calls religiosity and their worship of stars and the natural world he notes how the Islamic tradition 'recognised them as symbols, immediate manifestations, of the maker of Nature'.⁸⁸ Mary Kingsley's deductions are to be exactly the same on her travels in Africa and this is one of the elements of the faith that impresses itself on her the most as she is surrounded by the Africa forests amongst the many tribes she lives with. In *Travels in West Africa* Mary Kingsley provides the following description of the scenes on the Ogowe,

The majesty and beauty of the scene fascinated me, and I stood leaning with my back against a rock pinnacle watching it. Do not imagine it gave rise, in what I am pleased to call my mind, to those complicated, poetical reflections natural beauty seems to bring out in other people's minds. It never works that way with me; I just lose all sense of human individuality, all memory of human life, with its grief and worry and doubt, and become part of the atmosphere. If I have a heaven that will be mine.⁸⁹

Katherine Frank suggests that passages such as these within her writings are clear indications that Mary Kingsley was experiencing transcendentalism and that through her love

⁸⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *'On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History'*, Dent & Sons, London, 1948, p.279.

⁸⁷ Thomas Carlyle, *'On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History'*, Dent & Sons, London, 1948, p.283.

⁸⁸ Thomas Carlyle, *'On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History'*, Dent & Sons, London, 1948, p.283.

⁸⁹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Books, London, 1984, p.178.

of nature she can be best described as a pantheist.⁹⁰ She takes this point further by suggesting that Mary Kingsley's love of Africa, 'was at bottom a spiritual passion and her fascination with fetish arose from the kinship she recognised between her own heterodox beliefs and those of the Africans she lived among.'⁹¹ This passion and connection is most obvious in the passages in *Travels in West Africa* that are focused on the Fan tribe. The Fans were cannibals and considered therefore highly dangerous. But it is this danger and this lack of contamination from European values that Mary Kingsley was to admire. She notes how 'these Africans have more of the qualities I like than any other tribe I have met, it is but natural that I should prefer them. They are brave and so you can respect them, which is an essential element in a friendly feeling.'⁹² She continues,

Their countenances are very bright and expressive, and if once you have been among them, you can never mistake a Fan. But it is in their mental characteristics that their difference from the lethargic, dying-out coast tribes is most marked. The Fan is full of fire, temper, intelligence and go; very teachable, rather difficult to manage, quick to take offence, and utterly indifferent to human life.⁹³

In part, this could also be a description of herself - the fearless, independent woman who, whilst polite enough at times to take on board the advice of others, would also choose not to follow it. Katherine Frank notes how, 'for Mary, the Fan came to represent the pure, uncontaminated African: physically handsome, intelligent and brave'.⁹⁴ By being the only white woman to live and be with them day and night, Mary Kingsley could 'gradually, inexorably, shed the skin of her English feminine identity.'⁹⁵ Mary is to speak of the Fan as her 'brothers' and to describe her close affinity with them she not only describes their fetish and their traditions but also looks after their health and becomes an accepted member of their community.

Islam

Earlier in this chapter Mary Kingsley's constant invocations in the name of Allah have been discussed and the possible significance of this habit. This becomes even more important when we extend Carlyle's thesis on Mahomet and begin to plot the different trajectory of the Islamic tradition in West Africa from the Arabic formation. David Waines in his introductory

⁹⁰ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.156.

⁹¹ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.156.

⁹² Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p. 328.

⁹³ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p. 329.

⁹⁴ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, 1988, p. 189.

⁹⁵ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, 1988, p.189.

text on Islam notes that whilst Muslims belong to a world - wide community in much the same way as Christians, there have always been 'ethnic, linguistic and geographical diversity among the peoples who call themselves Muslims'.⁹⁶ He also provides a useful definition of the word Islam which means, 'the willing and active recognition of and submission to the command of the one, Allah,'⁹⁷ and of how the keynote of the Muslim faith is 'the emphasis upon direct human responsibility before Allah. Each individual who personally chooses to obey him directly confronts the divine will expressed in the Shari'ah and strives to conduct his or her life according to that imperative. This is without the aid of either an intermediary or some manner of collective responsibility'.⁹⁸ This is an important consideration when it is recognised that the Islamic tradition in certain pockets of Africa was quite well established by the time of Mary Kingsley's travels there.

In his geographical mapping of the Islamic tradition, Waines points out that the branch of Islam which is prevalent in the whole of North Africa, Central Africa and West Africa was influenced by the branch of Islamic scholarship called the Maliki School of Law. This was derived from the ideas of Malik b. Anas.⁹⁹ The centrality of the law, 'as a concrete expression of Allah's will and guidance, is therefore central to the individual and collective Muslim identity. It constitutes the sole blueprint for the good society.'¹⁰⁰ Important for this study is the connections that Mary Kingsley appears to begin to forge between certain African ideas about the law and individual responsibility and the Islamic traditions found in many of the areas that she visited. Her knowledge of this lead her to confide to the Scottish Presbyterian Missionary, Mary Slessor, 'her fascination with Islam and her belief that it was far less disruptive of African society and culture than was Christianity'.¹⁰¹ This is confirmed again in her later book *West African Studies* where Mary Kingsley further challenges the work of the Christian missionaries. She attacks them not only through their poor conversion rates, despite their continued disruptive presence in Africa, but also in the way in which the Christian faith left the African lost and confused in contrast to the Islamic tradition which worked to support many of their belief systems. She writes,

I know no more distressing thing than to see an African convert brought face to face with that awful thing we are used to, the problem of the omnipotent God and a suffering world. This does not worry the African convert until it hits him personally in grief and misery. When it does, and he turns and calls upon the God he has been taught will listen, pity and answer... it is

⁹⁶ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 2.

⁹⁷ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 3.

⁹⁸ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 63.

⁹⁹ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 66.

¹⁰⁰ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 63.

¹⁰¹ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p. 155.

horribly heartrending to me, for I know how real, how terribly real, the whole thing is to him and I therefore see the temptation to return to his old gods.¹⁰²

Katherine Frank suggests that it is 'this psychological problem of the silence of the white man's god - a silence so alien to the prevalence of supernatural forces in all aspects of African life - which was behind Mary's opinion that Islam was more appropriate to African culture than Christianity.'¹⁰³

'African Religion and the Law'

The interconnections and relationships between African law and the Islamic tradition, as well as other religious associations, are again further explored by Mary Kingsley in an essay called, *'African Religion and the Law'* which was originally delivered as a lecture at Oxford to the Hibbert Trustees.¹⁰⁴ The essay begins thus,

The inter-relationship between the religion and the law of the natives of West Africa is an exceedingly difficult study for many reasons, and I feel great diffidence in attempting to explain it in anything under a folio volume. My diffidence does not arise from a sense of any lack of material, nor from any lack of importance in the subject, but a feeling of personally not being sufficiently powerful to group and arrange the facts concerned so as to present them to you in a concise and coherent form.¹⁰⁵

Whilst this is pointing out the complexity of the area under discussion, this disclaimer or apology of inadequacy is a familiar writing device used by Mary Kingsley. For instance, in *Travels in West Africa*, she begins Chapter IV in the same way beginning by saying, 'I will not detain you with any account of the Oil Rivers here. They are too big a subject to compress into one thing; and for another I do not feel that I yet know enough to have the right to speak regarding them...'¹⁰⁶ She then provides a further series of excuses and insights into the demands of authorship,

The state of confusion the mind of a collector like myself gets into on the West Coast is something simply awful, and my notes for a day will contain facts relating to kraw-kraw, price of onions, size and number of fish caught, cooking recipes, genealogies, oaths (native form of), law cases, and market prices, etc., etc. And the undertaking of tidying these things up is no small one. As for one's personal memory it becomes a rag-bag into which you dip frantically when some one asks you a question, and you almost always fail to secure your particular fact rag for some minutes.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Mary Kingsley, *West African Studies* quoted in Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.178.

¹⁰³ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.178.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Kingsley, *'African Religion and the Law'* was later published in the *National Review*, September, 1897.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Kingsley, *'African Religion and the Law'*, *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.122.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.73.

¹⁰⁷ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (1897), Virago Press, London, 1984, p.73.

Such a device works to both authenticate her knowledge and familiarity but also to deny it. She appears to want to claim her experience in the field as being more authentic than just the reading of books whilst at the same time to maintain some modesty with regard to claiming to know everything about her subject area. This may be an issue of feminine propriety in order to conform to the expectations and assumptions about her audience/readership and Robert. D. Pearce in his biography of Mary Kingsley claims that this mode of writing was a familiar device and part of the wider debate about Mary Kingsley and her ambiguous gender identifications. He says that, 'With almost pathological modesty Mary Kingsley prefaced virtually everything she ever wrote with an apology for having written it and with a statement that she was unequal to the intellectual tasks she had set herself. This was 'unladylike'.'¹⁰⁸

This view of Mary Kingsley's complex relationship with gender identification is a recurrent theme both within her writings and writings about her. It is significant but there is also an additional dimension to this which, to date, has not been fully explored. This is the way in which Mary Kingsley's sense of herself as a woman is also tied up with her sense of belonging. Her writing self is that of the more restrained Englishwoman as distinct from her African self where she demonstrates she is 'a woman of exceptional courage'.¹⁰⁹ It is in Africa that she feels more 'at home' and it is the African cause which she wishes to draw attention to not that of herself. Hence, her employment of the etiquette of writing with regard to female propriety is part of a wider strategy to get attention for the cause she is fighting. Another part of this strategy, at times, was the adoption of the authoritative voice of the male expert. Robert D. Pearce again notes for example how, 'The study of law, she once wrote, 'is only a fit pursuit for any person like myself, who has not a wife and family''.¹¹⁰ It can be seen that in this essay on '*African Religion and the Law*' all of these conflicting impulses are on display.

In '*African Religion and the Law*' Mary Kingsley is keen to differentiate between the Africans who have been 'infused' with 'both Mahomedan and European forms of thought' and those to whom she refers as 'pure Negro'.¹¹¹ She states the following advice as that,

The essential thing that you must understand when you attempt to understand any West African native institution is the religion of the native, for this religion has so firm a grasp upon his mind that it influences everything he does. It is not a thing apart, as the religion of the

¹⁰⁸ Robert. D. Pearce, *Mary Kingsley, Light at the Heart of Darkness*, The Kensal Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 90.

¹⁰⁹ Robert. D. Pearce, *Mary Kingsley, Light at the Heart of Darkness*, The Kensal Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 88.

¹¹⁰ Mary Kingsley in Robert D. Pearce, *Mary Kingsley, Light at the Heart of Darkness*, The Kensal Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 89.

¹¹¹ Mary Kingsley, '*African Religion and the Law*', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.123.

European is at times. The African cannot say, "Oh, that's all right from a religious point of view, but one must be practical". To be practical, to get on in the world, to live the day or night through, he must be right in the religious point of view, namely, he must be on working terms with the great world of spirits around him. The knowledge of this spirit-world constitutes the religion of the African, and his customs and ceremonies arise from his idea of the best way to influence it.¹¹²

From the onset then she is concerned to plot the facts, that the African religion is a lived one, with no division between the spiritual and the earthly in terms of decision making or everyday social practices. From this beginning she then proceeds to relate the African experience to a wider philosophical and theological position through the ideas of Spinoza, quoting from his work, *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*. The passage reads,

As to the notion of the conception of the relationship of the spirit-world and earthly affairs held by the Africa, I find it most clearly set down in these words, the words of one of the greatest philosophers that the world has ever produced, I mean Spinoza. "To say everything happens according to natural laws, and to say that everything is ordained by the decree and ordinance of God is the same thing. Now, since the power in Nature is identical with the power of God, by which alone all things happen and are determined, it follows that whatsoever man, as part of Nature, provides himself with, to aid and preserve his existence, or whatsoever Nature provides him with without his help, is given to him solely by the Divine Power, acting either through human nature or through external circumstance, so whatever human nature can furnish itself with by its own efforts to preserve its existence may be fitly called the inward aid of God, whereas whatever else accrues to man's profit from outward causes may be called the external aid of God." Further on, Spinoza says, "By fortune I mean the ordinance of God so far as it directs human life through external and unexpected means." Herein you can read the religion of the African if you will but change the word God for the word spirits.¹¹³

What is highlighted here and thrown up for debate is the fact that in her other writings on Africa, Mary Kingsley whilst recording her travels never invokes the name of God but the name of Allah. It is possible to suggest that this becomes the case because of the closeness of the African life and its daily religious formations and that of the observances of those followers of the Islamic tradition. This is no more apparent than in relation to the law and hence the centrality of this essay of Mary Kingsley's and its importance. For whilst 'to the African the Universe is made up of Matter permeated by Spirit'¹¹⁴ and the way in which he lives out his life is largely determined by these spirits, there is also a paramount relationship between the spirits, the individual and the law. Just as within the Islamic tradition where 'the divine law joins ethical and more strictly legal matters together, thereby encouraging the harmonization of

¹¹² Mary Kingsley, 'African Religion and the Law', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.124.

¹¹³ Mary Kingsley, 'African Religion and the Law', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p. 124.

¹¹⁴ Mary Kingsley, 'African Religion and the Law', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.124.

conscience and the law',¹¹⁵ so with the African culture where 'the spirit policemen cannot be circumvented'¹¹⁶ and each individual is responsible for the maintenance of native law. This is further confirmed by Mary Kingsley in '*African Religion and the Law*' when, after providing some detailed descriptions of the different spirits and their spheres of influence, she answers the question, 'How is this society maintained?' by affirming that the society of the African, is closely knit together, you can see that every member of it is responsible to or for some other member, you see there is no mass of unemployment, starving poor in it; no police; no workhouses; no prisons; yet that the property of each individual member, male or female, free or slave, is regarded as their possession, and that is a thing that cannot be damaged or taken from them without reason.¹¹⁷

Mary Kingsley concludes the essay by pointing out the weaknesses of writers on African religion to date and their common failing which was to separate particular aspects of the culture. She states that whilst, 'It is true the laws of the Africans seem naturally to fall under two separate heads, which one might call civil and ecclesiastical. If, however, you attempted to study these laws under these two headings as separate things, you would soon find yourself enmeshed in difficulties.'¹¹⁸ Her advice in order to avoid this is 'to commence with the study of the African conception of the status of man in nature.'¹¹⁹ However, as one comes to expect with her writing, this passage of sound advice is then followed by an illustration which, in itself, seems to work to contradict her own logic. She notes that the African will make 'clear distinction between sin and crime, "god palaver and man palaver," as he calls these respectively'.¹²⁰ She finishes the essay with a clarion call for understanding the study of the religion, laws, and social status of the African native maintaining that,

It is our duty to know the true nature of those people whom we are now dealing with in tens of thousands, so that by this knowledge we may be enabled to rule them wisely, to give them chances of advancing that are chances they can avail themselves of, and thereby save thousands of human lives, both black and white, by means of that true knowledge which I regard as the inward aid of God.¹²¹

The troubled context that Mary Kingsley is obviously writing both within and about here is

¹¹⁵ David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.76.

¹¹⁶ Mary Kingsley, '*African Religion and the Law*', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.126.

¹¹⁷ Mary Kingsley, '*African Religion and the Law*', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.134.

¹¹⁸ Mary Kingsley, '*African Religion and the Law*', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.138.

¹¹⁹ Mary Kingsley, '*African Religion and the Law*', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.138.

¹²⁰ Mary Kingsley, '*African Religion and the Law*', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.139.

¹²¹ Mary Kingsley, '*African Religion and the Law*', *National Review*, London, September, 1897, p.139.

that of the late nineteenth century colonial dilemma. This huge area of concern and debate was one to which Mary Kingsley's writings contributed and much has been made of her close association with the cause of the British Traders in Africa,¹²² as well as her criticisms of the effort being made by the various Churches missions in Africa,¹²³ some of which have been acknowledged previously in this chapter.

Robert D. Pearce in his conclusion to a biography of Mary Kingsley claims that she is 'a creature impossible to tie down and neatly pigeon-hole. She was essentially a paradoxical human being'¹²⁴ and in so doing he sums up the various dualities of this Englishwoman. Mary Kingsley also, at times, claimed herself as African, was a woman but writes as if male, and who, through her writings about Africa also throws up the problematic relationship between religion and trade during the late nineteenth century. Further areas of contestation are those concerned with Mary Kingsley as a 'feminist of anti-feminist persuasion'.¹²⁵ A woman who cannot see the need to have equal rights in practical affairs in England but who journeys alone to a dangerous continent and who writes with feminist passion and ideals within the pages of *Travels in West Africa*. This chapter, rather than wishing to make 'whole' this complex woman of the nineteenth century, would suggest that this duality of Mary Kingsley is far from unique and can actually be seen as an exemplar of female being within a particular historical time and space. A moment in history when women had to employ a variety of strategies in their lives and their work in order to be heard and to be taken seriously. There are still many things about Mary Kingsley's contribution to late nineteenth century debates on gender, religion and identity to be unearthed for in her case, as with the other women in this study, the central role of religion and questions of identity have largely been ignored. This was a woman who as a non-Christian,¹²⁶ was making a plea for the African religion to be understood and to be valued rather than to be eradicated and who, towards the end of her life still held firmly against the Christian missionary approach as a solution. She writes, 'I fail to believe that Christianity will bring peace between two races, for the simple reason that though it may be

¹²² See in particular the seminal essay by J.E.Flint, 'Mary Kingsley - A Reassessment', *Journal of African History*, IV, I, London, 1963, pp. 95-104. Flint suggests that far from Mary Kingsley being 'a balanced thinker' she was 'completely partial and extreme' and more, that in fact she was 'the intellectual and philosophic spokeswoman for the British traders to West Africa', p.96.

¹²³ Robert D. Pearce notes how she referred to how 'the missionary-made African was the 'curse of the Coast', *Mary Kingsley, Light at the Heart of Darkness*, The Kensal Press, Oxford, 1990, p.78.

¹²⁴ Robert D. Pearce, *Mary Kingsley, Light at the Heart of Darkness*, The Kensal Press, Oxford, 1990, p.150.

¹²⁵ Robert D. Pearce, *Mary Kingsley, Light at the Heart of Darkness*, The Kensal Press, Oxford, 1990, p.150.

¹²⁶ Robert D. Pearce claims that, 'To start with Mary herself was not a Christian. She had been brought up a staunch Darwinian and her father's anti-clericalism almost certainly contributed to her antipathy towards missionary activity in Africa,' *Mary Kingsley, Light at the Heart of Darkness*, The Kensal Press, Oxford, 1990, p.79.

possible to convert Africans en masse into practical Christians, it is quite impossible to convert Europeans en masse'.¹²⁷ In common with her other writings on this topic, the ambiguity at the end of this statement is left for conjecture. Does she mean that most Europeans are no longer Christians or that it is impossible to convert them to an understanding of Africa and African ways? For ultimately, Mary Kingsley is to throw her weight behind African nationalism and is to argue that all in Africa 'must come forward and demonstrate that African nationalism is a good thing...for unless you preserve your institutions, above all your land law, you cannot, no race can, preserve your liberty.'¹²⁸

Within the territory of feminist debate Mary Kingsley also becomes a site of interest when one moves from the narrow confines of British feminism to a transcultural approach. For in her writings on African women can be seen the blurring of Mary Kingsley's identity with regard to questions of nationality. Katherine Frank suggests in her biography of Mary Kingsley that, 'A large part of the affinity Mary felt with African women arose from their resistance and even hostility to European 'civilization', 'a reasonable dislike' as Mary puts it, 'to being dispossessed alike of power and property in what they regard as their own country''.¹²⁹ There is here a further contestation between colonial patriarchy and the African tradition of matriarchy.¹³⁰ This position can be further supported by evidence written by Mary Kingsley in a private letter, 'where she identified herself with a feminized Africa'.¹³¹ She writes,

I will import you, in strict confidence, for if it were known it would damage me badly, my own opinion on the African. He is not 'half-devil and half-child', anymore than he is 'our benighted brother' and all that sort of thing. He is a woman...I know these nigs because I am a woman, a woman of masculine race but a woman still.¹³²

In terms of Mary Kingsley's own life, statements such as these reveal a deep affiliation with Africa and the African. Her travels there also provided her with a freer context, in some respects, for her to be a different kind of woman. Whereas in England Mary had always been confined, first in the role of the dutiful daughter, looking after the needs of her parents and

¹²⁷ Mary Kingsley in Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.314.

¹²⁸ Mary Kingsley in Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: the Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.314.

¹²⁹ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.181.

¹³⁰ This line of thought is further developed by Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.181-183.

¹³¹ Karen. R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1994, p. 152.

¹³² Mary Kingsley in a letter to Nathan, quoted in Karen. R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1994,

later, that of the dutiful sister to her brother Charles, Africa becomes the site of her 'struggle for independence and excitement'.¹³³ It provided her with a kind of freedom from the everyday social mores of late nineteenth century English society. The complex nature of this freedom, at the end of a century rife with other struggles of emancipation, can only now be appreciated by working with and across the arguments and complexities that Mary Kingsley was to write herself. This act of writing can also be seen as an act of empowerment as well as one of resistance.

Karen R. Lawrence, in *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, takes some of these arguments further by asserting that because of her 'responsibility of representing African culture to a British reading public, Kingsley's travels led her to recognise the political stakes of representation.'¹³⁴ This acute awareness led her to adopt a series of narrative masquerades, particularly with respect to gender, so that her travel writings work on many levels of duality. At times Mary Kingsley adopts the persona of a male adventurer, intrepid and courageous, at others she acts as the confused and disorganised white woman, who is very disingenuous about her knowledge and her capabilities. This duality is further developed in what Karen. R. Lawrence calls Kingsley's 'double vision'.¹³⁵ By this she means the ways in which 'her narrative self-representation acknowledges that the Western observer is the observed as well, both performer and make up artist.'¹³⁶ It is because of this that even though 'Kingsley constructs a narrative 'I' in her text, she deliberately eschews the search for identity' and her, 'hybrid narrative in fact frustrates our attempts to chart the narrator or traveller as a unified psychological 'self''.¹³⁷

Mary Kingsley remains then locked within a series of dualities – the English woman who felt more at home in Africa – the white European who championed the black African cause and favoured African nationalism. With respect to a personal religion Mary Kingsley appeared to remain deliberately enigmatic within her writings on the subject. During her trips to Africa there does however appear to have been a movement towards a transcendental stance. This is suggested by Katherine Frank who maintains that, 'the spiritual power she felt in the universe she found in the natural world – in the ocean, coast, and forest – not in creeds, in

p.152.

¹³³ Rosellen Brown, Preface to, Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.17.

¹³⁴ Karen, R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University press, Ithaca and London, 1994, p. 128.

¹³⁵ Karen. R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1994, p.149.

¹³⁶ Karen. R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1994, p.149.

¹³⁷ Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*,

bibles or churches, and she found it most ubiquitously and compellingly in West Africa'.¹³⁸

Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1994, p.128.

¹³⁸ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out, The Life of Mary Kingsley*, Corgi Books, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988, p.156.

Chapter Six Conclusion

The past, like the present, is the result of competing negotiated
versions of what happened, why it happened, with what consequence ¹

This thesis has worked to establish the importance of the need to extend the paradigms of current knowledge about issues to do with religion, gender identity and writing during the nineteenth century by using a case study approach in investigating the lives and works of four women from the period. The overlapping narratives and intertwined histories that have emerged between and with these women suggests that both the methodology of execution (interdisciplinary) and the textual basis of analysis could be further utilised for a larger comparative project into matters of religion and gender.

This study has worked to raise a number of questions about the 'gaps' of historical knowledge within a range of disciplinary debates and it has begun to establish that the method of raising questions is a valuable exercise in and of itself. The questions themselves acknowledge and help to establish new paradigms for thinking and reflection and to assert the necessity to keep the participatory hermeneutic dimension at the heart of such researches. This is essential in order to build upon previous scholarship where, 'all too typically, it is not that of real persons but of a 'collective subject' whose supposedly authoritative experience is either undifferentiated by gender, race, class or age, or defined as explicitly male.'² Feminist approaches to the study of religion, history and literature have been particularly instructive in facilitating these debates but there is also a need to acknowledge that 'feminist projects of disciplinary transformation may be caught up in contradictions arising from the histories of the disciplines in which change is sought.'³ These contradictions become particularly acute with the more 'famous' figures in this study - such as George Eliot - where the establishment of her as part of the canon of English Literature has, in itself, worked to confine the range and potential of her work as a female intellectual and represent her as 'just' a novelist. These issues of contradiction and confinement can also be seen to have been apparent to the women themselves in this study. In all of their writings they implicitly or explicitly are paying due attention to the effects of gender on the ways in which they both present their ideas and importantly, their perception of how these will be perceived by their nineteenth century readers. Even in their texts of self-assertion, such as Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography*, there is a

¹ Liz Stanley, *The auto/biographical I*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992, p.7.

² Rosalind Shaw, 'Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies', Ursula King, (ed.), *Religion and Gender*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, p.67.

³ Rosalind Shaw, 'Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies', Ursula King, (ed.), *Religion and Gender*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1995, p.68.

participatory hermeneutic on display with the recognition of how certain behaviours, opinions and practices will be 'read' as transgressive or recalcitrant. Another woman writing in the nineteenth century formally articulates this self-awareness. The American poet, Emily Dickinson, writes in one of her poems, 'They shut me up in Prose - / As when a little Girl / They put me in the Closet - / Because they liked me "still-"'⁴ The associations which Dickinson is making overt here between aspects of femininity, social practice and issues of textuality is apposite in terms of a continuation of the nineteenth century dominant ideologies of confining women within particular spheres of activity. Dickinson's poem continues, 'Still! Could themselves have peeped - / And seen my Brain - go round - / They might as well have lodged a Bird / For Treason - in the Pound -' which presents a further recognition of the potential challenge or 'treason' coming from the female intellectuals to current nineteenth century thinking. The case studies on these four women can begin a similar exegesis claiming that all of them, in different ways, would not be "still". They also work to support the statement that,

Cultural politics is concerned above all to situate culture within a social and historical and thus political context...Cultural politics sees the material and ideological as symbiotically related, recognising that ideas have a material origin and that the ideological has importance through the expression of ideas in concrete material practices.⁵

Whilst this study has been concerned to focus attention upon the role of religion and religious ideas for these women, it has also to be formally recognised that the empowerment offered to them via this also had a material basis. All the women, with the possible exception of Mary Kingsley although this is not wholly clear, needed to make money from their writings. The economic needs should not be minimised as being a contributor to their awareness of issues of propriety and writing. For, if they presented too much by way of 'difference', their early writings would not have been accepted and hence they would not have been paid. This economic factor, the material base, is often never fully acknowledged within the studies of literature except by proclaimed Marxist critics. These factors are important and relevant because,

Literary works are not mysteriously inspired, or explicable simply in terms of their authors' psychology. They are forms of perception; particular ways of seeing the world; and as such they have a relation to that dominant way of seeing the world which is the 'social mentality' or ideology of an age.⁶

and hence, the employment of the cultural chronotope as outlined in the introduction to this

⁴ Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, Thomas H. Johnson (ed.), *Poem 613*, dated c.1862, faber and Faber, London, 1970, p. 302.

⁵ Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992., p.3.

⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Methuen & Co., London, 1975, p.6.

thesis as a means of recognising these connections. These women are fully aware of their position and in some instances had to be duplicitous (the taking of false names etc.) in order to be published and to be paid. Grace Aguilar and Harriet Martineau were both, in part, financially responsible for the welfare of their mothers following the deaths of their fathers and relied on their writings to provide this support. George Eliot needed to be self-sufficient in order to maintain her independence and Mary Kingsley would eventually make a living from both travelling and writing. She was also, much more consciously involved in economic exchange as she began to literally 'trade' her way through Africa - exchanging goods for services.

By using and employing the theoretical concepts pertinent to autobiographical critique in an assessment of the lives and work of the four women there has been a concern to make no claims for the division between 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' lives but to work to begin to assert that the connections made between these and other categories of distinction and difference has much to offer to an understanding , not only of the past, but also for the present. This generalist claim can be substantiated further by the addition of other inquiries that raise and extend the debates begun here. From the onset to embark on the lives and works of four separate individuals was acknowledged as having positive and negative aspects. For, whilst the positive aspects of comparative analysis and connection have been of primary importance here, it can also be asserted that some of the minutiae of each individual may have been lost in the necessity of selection and omission. This can be remedied by further reference to other works by more competent biographers and historical commentators whose concern has been with the individual as celebrity of their age. The comparative approach taken in this study has also been deliberate in its attempt to acknowledge that, 'in feminist and cultural political terms, peoples' lives and behaviours make considerably more sense when they are located through their participation in a range of overlapping social groups, rather than being portrayed as somehow different, marked out all along by the seeds of their greatness'.⁷ If anything, the study has worked to suggest further that links can be made productively between those figures who have in fact been positioned as 'great' or exceptional (for example, George Eliot) and those who have virtually disappeared from view (Grace Aguilar).

These links have been possible because as it was suggested in the introduction, autobiography distinguishes itself as a genre by the act of interpretation. By working across the representations offered by Grace Aguilar and George Eliot it has been possible to make these links more explicit in terms of the concerns of some of their work. Grace Aguilar was using her own denominational religion as a spring board for her novels about Jewishness and this

allowed her to try and explain and explore how past actions and attitudes had led to certain cultural stereotypes of the Jew. George Eliot had entered these debates with similar objectives to Grace Aguilar but had come to this from her studies and intellectual preoccupations with matters religious. What is interesting of course, is how these two women, who are now very differently positioned 'in history' shared this common pursuit. Thus questions of gender, ethnicity and religion are analysed and debated within both *The Vale of Cedars* and *The Spanish Gypsy* to acknowledge how 'a "Jew" would be defined as much by the social setting as internally'.⁸ Both women select fifteenth century Spain as a particular moment in the past when this has appeared to be most overt or significant. There are however, also differences that can be suggested arising from the different relations that Grace Aguilar and George Eliot have to questions of 'Jewishness'. Grace Aguilar is a Jew and a believer, George Eliot is not but is interested in Judaism as a cultural and intellectual phenomenon. In some ways George Eliot can be accused of actually employing the stereotypical representations she actually wants to critique. This is particularly the case with her depiction of the male Jew in *The Spanish Gypsy* - where Sephardo is offered as a magician in his tower surrounded by the instruments of sorcery and alchemy. Grace Aguilar, however, is more concerned to fully evaluate how such connotations and images have been placed upon the Jewish race and to question why they are perceived as mysterious, and deviant. Aguilar also provides a particular perspective on Judaism as mediated through female experience. This, as has been suggested in Chapter Two is unusual for, 'The gender designation of the term "Jew"...is masculine. While women (and images of women) are present in the various investigations, the central figure throughout is that of the male Jew, the body with the circumcised penis - an image crucial to the very understanding of the Western image of the Jew, at least since the advent of Christianity'.⁹ Michael Galchinsky takes this point further by suggesting in his study of Grace Aguilar, 'that by focusing on the home rather than the synagogue as the place of ritual activity, Aguilar attempts to transfer the centre of religiosity and instruction from public to secret space'.¹⁰ He also claims that by doing this 'Grace Aguilar did not resist but spoke the contradictions of her culture'.¹¹

The thesis has raised a number of questions about gender perspectives and here it might be useful, as within any documentary of closure, to provide a summary of some of the

⁷ Liz Stanley, *The Autobiographical I*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992, p.12.

⁸ Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, Routledge, New York & London, 1991, p. 4.

⁹ Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, Routledge, New York & London, 1991, p.5.

¹⁰ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p. 186.

¹¹ Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996, p.171.

most pertinent features. How is it that these four women, even allowing for their different backgrounds, are all concerned to utilise their sense of religion and knowledge about the world and through this lens to begin to reach answers to other problems within their own age? Bearing in mind that none of them had any access to what we now call higher education there are several questions without answers. How did middle class women during the nineteenth century have the motivation of intellectual endeavour and in particular the will to learn languages other than their own? Also in what ways did they gain access to new ideas about the world and areas of debate when often they were denied public voice in these? Interesting also from this however is the ways in which all four women see themselves as 'educators' of others throughout their lives and careers. Writing for them is then the vehicle for this and all of them present didactic representations. It is also, perhaps obvious but essential to note here that none of these women were to have children of their own to teach. All were childless, and all of them 'single' apart from George Eliot, who though never marrying George Henry Lewes had a partnership with him until his death when she then married a man younger than herself. It can be suggested in this study which is concerned to make links between the lives and the work of these women that they all shared an acute sense of their age with its set gender prescriptions. However in their own personal lives many of them did transgress or at least worked to challenge the very stereotypes laid down for them. Their choice of the fictional narrative form can be seen as perhaps the only means by which they could explore and present their visions and versions of different ways of being for their women characters and thus by implication other ways of being for themselves. Even Mary Kingsley's writings of her travels employ fictional strategies. Religion for all of the women did provide a structure for their critical engagement with key debates of the nineteenth century as well as providing, at different times, solace and a sense of identification. It is fitting to suggest that this structural framework for thinking and writing continued throughout their lives in varying degrees. Grace Aguilar died still holding the main tenets of her faith whereas Harriet Martineau and George Eliot can be seen as members of a developing nineteenth century continuum whereby,

There is of course a sense in which people like these authors gradually 'lost their faith' because certain Christian doctrines had ceased to shape their lives. But in the process, as one fair-minded commentator has observed, 'a faith was slowly forged by which men did shape their lives - the ideals of a humanist, secular, progressive, and scientific age...It was in terms of this newer and confident faith...that the truth of revelation was judged'.¹²

Mary Kingsley, inhabiting as she did the late nineteenth century, can be seen to represent a

¹² James Moore, 'The Crisis of Faith: Reformation versus Revolution', G. Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. II, Controversies*, Manchester University Press, in Association with The Open University, 1988, p.223.

growing interest and awareness in 'other' religions to Christianity as the world became a more knowable map as a consequence of people like herself travelling and 'bringing back' to Britain different knowledges.

Thomas Carlyle was also able to comment upon this matter of religion as a 'way of life' in his work, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*. He records,

It is well said, in every sense, that a man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him. A man's or a nation of men's. By religion I do not mean here the church-creed which he professes, the articles of faith which he will sign and, in words or otherwise, assert; not this wholly, in many cases not this at all...But the thing a man does practically believe and this is often enough without asserting it even to himself, much less to others; the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to this mysterious universe, and his duty and destiny there, that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest. That is his religion; or it may be, his mere skepticism and no-religion: the manner it is in which he feels himself to be spiritually related to the unseen world or no-world; ...¹³

Again, it might be stating the obvious here but Thomas Carlyle's project is of course with men as heroes and it is into this argument that he is concerned to plot the influence of religion and its manifestations. There are no references as to how women and their religious feelings might be constituted, displayed or felt. This is significant in itself within the domains of the arguments already outlined in this study and it is fitting to think about this statement from Carlyle as also one that we could claim as also appropriate to apply to the women in this study. This is not though to ask for them to be considered 'heroines' but merely to acknowledge more fully women's engagement with these issues and debates.

What is shared by all four women has been a legacy which has attempted to confine them within particular intellectual spheres of activity rather than to see them as 'Great Women of Letters' on a par with their male contemporaries as outlined in the introduction to this study. In part this can be explained by the perspective offered from feminist scholarship that 'the exclusion of women from theoretical discourse, is typical of received academic histories'¹⁴ and how this has affected all areas of disciplinary study. Susan Sniader and Evelyn Torton Beck have pointed out how this relates to the tradition of literary criticism,

It is useful to remind ourselves that in a patriarchal society, the idea of woman as thinker or theoretician is seen virtually as a contradiction in terms. While the term woman writer is clear evidence of the society's basic conception of the artist as male, our comfort with the phrase does suggest some recognition of women as creators...Patriarchal culture has grudgingly learned to tolerate the woman artist, yet it continues to resist, denigrate, and mistrust woman as critic, theory-builder, or judge... the term woman critic sounds like an awkward, faulty

¹³ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, J.M.Dent & Sons, London, 1908, p.240.

¹⁴ Lana. F. Rakow, *Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy its Due*, John Storey, (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, Prentice Hall, 1998, p.276.

construction, not corresponding to any veritable reality.¹⁵

This study has worked with these ideas both in its concern - even within the title - to position 'women writers' but also with regard to demonstrating that these women were contributors not only to debates of their age but to future debates. They have left a lasting contribution to the debates on the histories of feminism and questions of self - formation and identity in particular. It is only by working across disciplinary territories and keeping in mind the wider intellectual and cultural debates that these associations can be made for as Nancy K. Miller asserts,

In many ways the reconstruction of feminism, like deconstruction which involves two principles or steps, is doubled dealing: a reversal of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system. But the reconstruction sought by feminist literary theory necessarily operates a specific inflection (and displacement) of that set of gestures: the establishment of a female tradition - a move that by its own claims to representation seeks to unsettle the claims of literary history - and a steady, Medusa-like gaze from its won genealogies at a tradition that has never thought to think back through its mothers.¹⁶

This thesis at its most ambitious moments is part of this new reconstruction. To work to provide connections and associations which have been hitherto ignored or marginalised and thus offer a kind of tradition of women thinkers and writers but also to acknowledge how this works in different ways within different disciplinary areas. In order to remain mindful of these it was also essential to note how these women with writing themselves as subjects into these varying discourses appears to be in keeping with Paul Valery's suggestion that, 'There is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully preserved, of some autobiography'.¹⁷

Through its attempts to offer the lives of the four women as cultural chronotopes of such associations and connections, the location of all of them within the culturally specific moment of nineteenth century England has also been important. There has to be an acknowledgement that the focus of this study whilst claiming and hoping to break down or intervene in certain scholastic practices has also, inadvertently, worked to perpetuate certain aspects of euro-centric thought. It, in paying attention to the lives and work of four English, white, middle-class women from educated and, perhaps, privileged positions within nineteenth century culture continues to replicate certain models of analysis. Having signified this limitation of an andro-centric view of the world it does also have the advantage of being able to locate these women in full recognition that 'the social relations between genders must be

¹⁵ Susan Sniader Lanser & Evelyn Torton Beck, 'Why are there no great women critics?: And what difference does it make?' Julia A. Sherman & Evelyn Torton Beck, (eds.), *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the sociology of knowledge*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1979, p.79.

¹⁶ Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, Routledge, New York & London, 1991, p.67.

¹⁷ Paul Valery quoted in Nancy K Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, Routledge, New York & London, 1991, p.1.

recognised as socially constituted and historically and geographically differentiated'.¹⁸ Their subsequent strategies and interventions with regard to the dominant ideological formations of masculinity and femininity in the nineteenth century in their writings and in their own lives can be seen as an important factor. For as R. W. Connell argues, 'hegemonic gender relations become established at particular periods, and in particular contexts, reflecting the dominance of specific ways of being masculine or feminine'.¹⁹

Ursula King in the edited collection of essays, *Religion and Gender*, reminds us that when gender is 'used as an analytical category it is also an important perspective for organising knowledge.'²⁰ Hence, the application of this approach to the nineteenth century, particularly in respect to the study of religion, and its influence on women of the period works to disrupt previous knowledge of the period and to extend certain debates because,

Gender and religion are closely interrelated as our perceptions of ourselves are shaped by and deeply rooted in our culturally shared religious and philosophical heritage, even when this is rejected. Religious traditions, beliefs and practices too are shaped by and perceived from the perspective of gender. Initially, this may be an unconscious process but with the contemporary growth of critical gender studies the transmission and perception of religious beliefs and the participation in religious activities have themselves become reflective activities. Gender studies are beginning to make an impact on the contemporary study of religion and are setting new research agenda for religious studies.²¹

¹⁸ Nina Laurie, Claire Dwyer, Sarah Holloway & Fiona Smith, *Geographies of New Femininities*, Pearson Education Limited, 1999, p.4.

¹⁹ R.W.Connell, *Masculinities*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, introduction.

²⁰ Ursula King, (ed.), *Religion and Gender*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1995,p.6.

²¹ Ursula King, (ed.), *Religion and Gender*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1995,p.2.

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